NEW SERIAL STORY. BEGIN TO-DAY.

SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 626. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 29TH, 1900. [ONE PENNY.

How to Cure Indigestion.

(Quoted from "Our Home.")

"Indigestion or Dyspepsia, though it may not completely incapacitate a person, yet renders life a misery to a great extent. There are so many forms of Indigestion, too, and it leads to so many other diseases that it should always, if possible, be stopped in its earliest stages. With the change of season more people than usual suffer from derangement of the System, and it is therefore at this time that it becomes specially helpful to recommend a simple, yet thoroughly reliable remedy. Guy's Tonic has stood the test of many years' use, and becomes more popular from day to day. Its effect is quite wonderful; people who suffer from dreadful Discomfort after they have had a meal, find a course of Guy's Tonic gives them relief, and makes eating once more a pleasure, instead of an experience to be dreaded. Flatulence and Nausea are removed, and the food is not only enjoyed, but benefits the system.

"Debility causes Indigestion, and in such cases a tonic is of the greatest benefit, and the weakness that follows Influenza can be treated by no better remedy than Guy's Tonic. It is of simple Vegetable origin, is widely recommended by Medical Men, and is in use in many Hospitals. It can be bought in bottles at 1s. 1½d. at chemists and stores, but should there be any difficulty in getting it, it can be had direct from Guy's Tonic Company, 12 Buckingham Palace Road, S.W., who also will send free to anyone who writes for it, a little booklet, giving particulars of the many complaints for which Guy's Tonic proves an invaluable remedy."

Nausea and Flatulence Removed.

Mr. W. Campbell Muir, of Inistrynich, Dalmally, N.B., writes:

"For the last four months I have been suffering from "Nausea, Flatulence, and Depression. Occasionally three "days would pass without my having eaten solid Food. "I tried various remedies which did good for a day or "two, but the effects were not permanent. I thought at "last I would try Guy's Tonic, and with great pleasure I "have to inform you that I had only taken half a bottle "before my Appetite returned, the Flatulence disappeared, and I am now as well as ever."

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A new size (Six Ounce) Bottle of Guy's Tonic, price 1s. 1½d., is now on Sale at all Chemists and Stores.

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"TATCHO" is a brilliant spirituous tonic, the colour of whisky, free from all grease. A sprinkle of a few drops on the scalp and five minutes with the brush daily works marvels with every head of hair.

"TATCHO" acts as an invigorating tonic. It stops the hair falling, creates a luxuriant growth, and imparts to it a bright and youthful lustre.

"When I discovered the preparation, I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders," said Mr. George R. Sims to the representative of the *Daily Mail*. "Look at my hair now. Look at the colour. In time people got to know. Then the trouble began.

"Letters in thousands poured in to me from men and women in every quarter of the world, from all parts of the Kingdom, from America, India, Africa, China, and Australia. The work of answering the letters was enormous, and as far as possible the desired information was supplied; but it became quite evident that at the rate at which the demand was increasing I should very soon need a large staff of clerks to attend solely to the hair renewer department of correspondence.

"In consequence, I said to myself, Why should this thing go on? If the public wants my hair renewer, the public shall have it; but the demand must be met in the ordinary business-like way. So I resolved to place the genuine article within reach of all, and with the assistance of a number of gentlemen, possessing the necessary commercial facilities, that has been accomplished."

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LARGE TRIAL BOTTLES OF TATCHO

to enable those who have not yet profited by Mr. G. R. Sims' discovery, to have the opportunity of doing so. The Company does this in the belief that such distribution will enable the preparation to become more widely known, and will introduce it to every home in a far more satisfactory manner than through unlimited puffing by advertisement.

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A FULL SIZE 4s. 6d. TRIAL BOTTLE OF "TATCHO" POST PAID,

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SHORT STORIES

No. 626.] For the Week Ending December 29th, 1900. [ONE PENNY.

AT THE BOTTOM OF A WELL.

"I WISH you to dig here," said Miss Morson. "I may have reasons, sentimental ones; but they would not interest you."

"And if we should meet insuperable difficulties?"

"I will bear the loss."

"Very well," said the expert; "I don't like the soil, and it is a pity to mar the beauty of this lovely spot; but I won't persist in what you are pleased to term frivolous objections."

"I hope your workmen are temperate, married men."

"One is single, but his age is not less than forty-five, and he looks older. The other is a benedict of thirty. Both are intemperate occasionally, and they also swear; but potential angels are few in the trade, and I never seek them."

Miss Morson considered the answer for a few moments, and as the men were not likely to flutter the hearts of her domestics, she professed to be satisfied.

Two days later the well-sinkers arrived. The bachelor was tall, and bowed. His sun-browned face was thin, and his dull eyes and heavy lips almost hid the mark of the gentleman.

He stood for some moments near a cluster of alders that half-hid a rustic chair, and stared at the grey house visible through a frame of trees; then he smiled, slapped his leg, and uttered an oath that thrilled the rough, common-looking benedict.

"Anything wrong, Jim?" queried that worthy.

"Do you believe in fate?" asked Jim, still looking at the house.

"No."

"Then you're a fool. When the boss said Elm House, Scratby, I never thought of this house; thirty years of starving and loafing makes a man dull."

"Did you know this place thirty years ago?"

"Know it; why I helped to plant that tree by the gate, and I made that rustic chair, or one like it. I wonder who lives here now."

"They tell me no beer is allowed at the house, so I worn't interested in the name."

"Well, people change their residences, and sometimes they die in thirty years. Let's get to work, Roger."

Jim was very silent as he worked and it seemed to his companion that he was thinking of other matters; but good progress was made, and at noontide when Miss Morson reached the alders, some hundreds of bricks were piled and Roger was wheeling away the earth thrown up by Jim.

Miss Morson walked close to the excavation and Roger warned her away.

"Surface soil ain't first-class," he said, "an' we can't lower the ring yet; so keep ten yards away, please."

"Who is foreman here?"

Jim raised himself and lifted his slouch cap, and Miss Morson stared at him as she would have stared at an apparition.

Roger grasped the shafts of his barrow and moved away.

"I am not surprised," said Miss Morson, recovering her composure without apparent difficulty.

Jim bowed again.

"I suppose you had good reason for changing your name," she continued.

"Family reasons," he said in very low tones, "no others, believe me. Do you wish me to go?"

"Certainly not. Resume your work Mr.—er—Phillips. You came here knowing that I still occupy Elm House."

"I was nearly drunk when I received instructions, and the name escaped me."

Miss Morson raised her head and looked down on her nose; then she gathered up her skirts and walked away with an unusually majestic stride. Jim again bent over his spade, and when Roger returned there was more than enough earth to fill his barrow.

At sunset the well-sinkers retired to the Green Gate tavern, and after tea Roger joined the company in the bar. But Jim walked abroad. There were no clouds in sight and the full moon made Scratby look very beautiful. So he moved along a narrow path leading to Elm House and listened to the nightingales. At length he halted beside the gate leading to the grounds, and resting his elbows on the top rail looked ahead, not to admire the beauty of the scene, but to refresh his memory. This done, he leapt the gate and walked towards the rustic chair. He had nearly reached it when a woman cried:

"You are trespassing; please leave the grounds again."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, madam," said Jim, "I am

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merely going to satisfy myself that the work is all right."

"Don't tell falsehoods, Mr. Phillips, you came to look at my house and grounds by moonlight."

"You are right," said Jim coolly, "and I apologise

"You are trespassing. Please leave the grounds again."

for the falsehood, our meeting disconcerted me for a moment."

"I always go over my grounds before retiring; servants are not to be trusted."

"You trust other people, tramps for instance."

Miss Morson toyed with a whistle and carelessly looked at a very heavy walking stick.

"I am glad to see you are prepared," said Jim "But I suppose the old place is as peaceful as ever."

"Disreputable persons sometimes wander here."

"Thanks, I understand. But they are wanderers from necessity."

"Or from foolish choice. Where have you been all these years?"

"Austral a, Africa, and America. Living like a dog, and unconsciously cultivating the manners of one."

"You are disguising them to-night."

"It is an effort, Madge."

"Mr. Phillips."

"Pardon me, Miss Morson. I did not know how low I had fallen until I saw you to-day."

"I did not think you occupied so high a position in the world."

"Thanks again. Probably you thought I was in prison, or better still, dead by order of Judge Lynch. Well, perhaps I have escaped my deserts. Yet at one time I was manager of a ranch out West, and if there had been no city journeys and no saloons I should have done well. After a row with the boss I joined the Brazilian army and won a commission in the field; but I insulted a general, and half his command hunted me out of the country. I then prospected in Rhodesia; no luck. So I fell back on my profession, civil engineering, you know, and helped to sink shafts in the Transvaal. I left that place in time to escape drinking myself to death; existed six months as a sundowner in Australia; and then returned to England, where I have been living a tolerable life ever since."

"I am not sorry for you, or even interested in your story."

"I did not hope to interest you; but it is pleasant to talk sometimes of oneself. Shall I leave you now?"

"I am going indoors."

"Then I will stay here a little while. Good night, Miss Morson."

She stepped from the shadow of the alders and stood erect in the moonlight.

Jim looked at the stern pale face and clear eyes, and saw that her forehead was wrinkled, and her hair touched with grey.

"Good night," he said again. "If you can forgive me, please do."

"What have I to forgive?"

"Perhaps I spoilt your life as well as my own."

"Spoilt my li e, bah. I have loved toads; but I never loved you."

"Good night, Miss Morson."

Miss Morson, without replying, walked away, and a few minutes later Jim heard the yard gate closed with unnecessary violence.

"Looks as lovable as marble," he mused. "Yet I loved her in the old days, and I thought she loved me. Not pleasant to be placed lower than toads, and I believe she is sincere. So 'tis all up, Jim. She's hard, and wouldn't shed a tear if you died. Yet they say she's the Lady Bountiful of these parts, and this well is to replace one which the village doctor connects with an outbreak of typhoid. Some women with nothing at home to love have large hearts for the outside world. Good-night, Madge."

He kissed the trunk of the elm that grew near the gate, and added as he looked at its gently moving boughs:

"We planted you, I and Madge. She used a spade like a man, and threw the earth up faster than I can throw it now. You were to have sheltered our family old fellow, we pictured ripe age under your boughs. God forgive me, she deserved a fuller life."

Jim looked at the house again, shrugged his shoulders and walked from the grounds.

That night he drank heavi'y, and in the morning his spade trembled in his hands, but he worked doggedly, and Roger found it difficult to keep pace with him. In the afternoon Jim often rested, and looked towards the house, but Miss Morson did not approach the well until the men were preparing to leave Then she bowed stiffly to Jim and passed on, after a brief inspection.

A week later the master arrived.

He had faith in his men, but he thought some personal superintendence was essential, and the men did not object. Jim had fitted the bricks carefully, but when men are working in loose and troublesome soil fifty or sixty feet below the surface, it is good to know that some one who desires their safety is above.

Jim often looked from the bottom of the well to the small piece of sky visible above, half-expecting to see a woman's face, but he was disappointed. The bucket

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went up and down with monotonous regularity, and only the face of the master was seen, which, Jim thought, looked strained and apprehensive.

One evening Jim ascended, smiling blandly. The spring was within measurable distance and he believed another day would see ten feet of water in the well. "I shall be glad," he added, "for my nerves are not just now better than a woman's."

"Be careful," said the master, "and promise me that you won't drink heavily until the job is finished."

"All right," returned Jim, "the promise is as easy to keep as to make in this case."

He heard next morning that Miss Morson had obtained from the master reassuring opinions regarding the safety of his workmen, and Jim smiled. The smile appeared at intervals as he filled the bucket, and Roger, more than once rested on his spade and looked at him.

"Am I unusually interesting?" Jim asked.

"You keep on grinnin'," returned Roger, "I don't understand why. This air is enough to choke me."

"Perhaps I'm happy because this is our last day down here."

"I hope so, but unless I go aloft for a mouthful o' fresh air I shan't know night from day. Hi! master, I'm coming up."

"Ta, ta," said Jim. "Come back soon, your conversation lightens the toil."

Jim seldom whistled and never sang, but as Roger moved from the mouth of the well a baritone that had once been sweet and powerful was heard, and those on the surface listened, amazed. The music was unknown to them and the words were indistinct, yet the song thrilled them.

The master peered into the well and saw Jim working in his old style. The bucket was filled, the last spadeful of earth flattened down with a stroke that hushed the music for a second, then, as the bucket was raised, the music stopped altogether, and a dull, echoing roar was mingled with a shriek.

The master crawled to the mouth of the well and looked down, his eyes staring, and his face ghastly. Jim could not be seen, and the bottom of the well was a chaos of bricks and loose earth.

"Heavens," he gasped. "Jim is buried. Stand by the windlass; I must go down hand over hand."

He snatched a spade with a cord attached to its handle, and holding this with his teeth descended for about thirty feet; then his heart sank and he looked at the bulging brickwork and shuddered. Ten feet lower and perhaps he too would be buried.

For some moments he stared at the spot where a man was dying unseen, then, reviling his own cowardice he cut the rope at his feet and bade the man at the windlass raise him again with all speed.

Roger was ready, but the master held him back.

"Jim is dead, and you have a family. Listen!"

Another mass of soil fell, and Roger whispered:

"There's fifteen feet o' soil on him now. No man can help him."

Labourers were hastily summoned, but they loved life, and none would venture into the death-trap. So, when Miss Morson reached the scene all were staring at the well, and talking softly.

Miss Morson clutched an alder branch as she listened to the truth; but recovering, she asked:

"Are you all cowards?"

"I bain't a coward," said Roger, looking at the crowd, "and no man must say as much. Give me a drink o' brandy and I'll go down."

And he did, in spite of the remonstrances of the master; but before the bottom was touched he shouted to be raised again, and returned to the surface with the information that a mass of red earth was ready to fall; that it must fall if the *débris* were removed, and that the man on whom it should fall would never know what struck him.

Miss Morson clutched an alder branch as she asked: "Are you all cowards?"

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Miss Morson turned from Roger, and looked at the crowd; but no one moved.

"If he were alive, mum," said an old labourer; "I'd chance it, but a man can't only be buried."

Miss Morson offered twenty pounds for the recovery of the body, then thirty, forty, but in vain.

"'Tis death to go down," said Roger, "and what's the use o' a hundred pounds to a dead man?"

Miss Morson sighed and returned to her house. A few minutes afterwards an old servant found her weeping just like an ordinary woman.

On the morrow she rode to Denemouth, whence she dispatched a telegram to the master informing him that

Part of the stranger's heavy beard fell away, and a white throat and skin were revealed.

she had engaged a clever and daring well-sinker who would reach Elm House early in the afternoon and attempt to recover the body.

The news went round, and when a stalwart stranger reached the scene a great crowd was collected about the gate. The stranger, without a glance in their direction, remarked to the master, "The lady at the house says you'll give me all the assistance I need. She seems too cut up to come herself. Says 'tis all her fault, and wishes she'd never thought about the well; but I says, what is to be will be. So I'm ready."

The master looked curiously at the stranger. He was bearded, and a slouch cap covered his forehead. His voice was very low and seemingly strained, while his calmness did not disguise a reasonable amount of fear. The master pointed out the extreme danger of the task, but the stranger refused to listen. He wanted exact information, and two vigilant men at the windlass, nothing more.

These wants having been satisfied, he descended, and after a brief examination of the strata and the brick-work, he proceeded to dig. The bucket was filled and raised with fair regularity, and to the surprise of everybody there was no fall. Great masses of earth loomed above the daring man, but he gave no heed to them. Gradually his spade reduced the depth of earth above the dead, the borer was discovered, and as evening approached, it was whispered that the stranger had nearly uncovered poor Jim. The excitement increased when the master, after a long examination of the well remarked to an assistant. "If Jim is not raised within an hour he'll have company."

Half-an-hour passed and the stranger was seen on his knees, cautiously scraping the earth aside, and the master looked at his windlass rope. It was strong enough to raise a ton, and satisfied with his examination he again looked into the well. Jim was uncovered, and the stranger was wiping the soil from the still face.

The master opened his eyes very wide because the stranger clasped the rigid form as though fearful of losing it again, and the rough beard was for a moment pressed to the dead man's forehead while the sound of a kiss floated upward. Then the stranger placed the body in a bucket so that it could be raised without touching the sides of the well, and shouted, "Haul up."

The men at the windlass obeyed, and as the bucket swung clear the stranger grasped it and uttered a cry of terror. For a few moments a sudden strain almost overpowered the men but they struggled bravely and the master cried:

"Thank Heaven," as tender hands lifted the stranger to a place of safety and Jim was laid on the rustic chair beneath the alders.

"A narrow squeak," gasped the master. "We dragged them through the fall. How are you, old chap?"

"Fainted or stunned," said Roger. "Undo his collar, sir, that's it. Now a drop o' brandy an'—What's this?" Roger stepped back in astonishment as a part of the stranger's heavy beard fell away and a white throat and chin were revealed.

"Do you want help there, mates?" asked a policeman.

"Yes," said Roger, reverently fastening the collar again, "but not from you. Send two or three women for'ard and keep the men away, while I run to the house an' tell 'em Miss Morson ain't dead, but only cut an' bruised."

A. H. Smith.

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The enlargements, which are of the head and shoulders only, can be made from any photograph, large or small, tintypes, or any kind of glass picture, provided the print is legible. The price is 7s. for photos of civilians, and 6s. for those of soldiers and sailors in uniform.

Full particulars appeared last week and will appear again next week.

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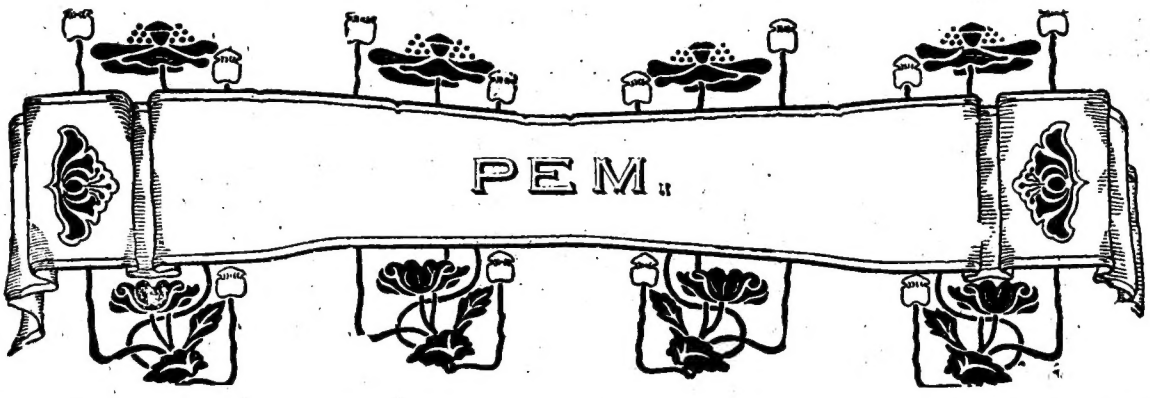

SHE was only a London flower-girl; nothing better, and—nothing worse.

Her name was Emily Petherick; but with her sister-vendors, and with her intimates generally, she was just Pem Peth'ick.

In her business she was successful above the average, although it is difficult to say why, since her brusqueness, and independent dealing with her customers, would, one would have thought, have operated adversely in her commercial transactions.

Probably, the secret lay in her having a connection, people who knew her, and made allowance for her odd ways. Strangers seldom patronised her, a fact she regretted but little. She served them when they came, and there was an end of it; while she was absolutely indifferent as to whether or not they were likely to come again.

Pem was a striking-looking girl, for one of her class; of middle height, and with a set of the head that gave her an appearance decidedly superior to her station.

Sal Emmet said that she, Pem, was "stuck up" ("chock full o' beastly pride," was, I believe, the actual expression) and if that meant that Pem kept herself strictly to herself, and maintained a close reserve upon the subject of her private affairs, then undoubtedly the allegation was more than justified.

Sal Emmet's motive in saying what she did is of course open to question, being entirely another matter.

That Pem had a sweetheart is in nowise remarkable, seeing that a drunken mother, and a by no means sober, and altogether brutal step-father made what little home she had almost impossible, and a place to be avoided upon any and every opportunity.

I don't think that she would have deliberately chosen Bill Smith, under different circumstances.

A hawker of the merry "winkle" and the festive "shrimp," he was but a colourless specimen of the ordinary street boy. If anything, Pem had the advantage of him in point of years, but they were, after all, children, if children of an abnormal growth.

Bill's knowledge, or, shall we say, its converse, was of a fearful and wonderful kind; its full flavour, and distinctive value being especially and peculiarly apparent on such occasions as a Sunday afternoon on Hampstead Heath, or in Regent's Park, or a street ramble after dark when the lamps were lit.

It would be rash to say that Pem correctly gauged the depth of his ignorance, but it may be safely inferred that she looked leniently upon it.

In fact, but for the matter to be now related, the course of humble love would possibly have run straight and smooth, with the usual results: an early marriage and its inevitable consequences, viz; squalor and an occasional "smashing" by the head of the firm.

Pem's "pitch" was by the steep flight of steps in Villiers Street which lead up into Charing Cross Station.

Every morning, between nine and eleven a continuous stream of business men poured down out into the street.

This two hours was Pem's harvest-time; this and later in the afternoon from five to six.

But it was on the stroke of "ten" that she would wake up to special alertness. Many a would-be customer then failed to attract her attention. She did not seem to care, her eyes were fixed upon the station door at the top of the steps.

"'Ere y'are, sir!" shrieked Sal Emmet, seizing her opportunity, and capturing a smart, elderly dandy, one of Pem's "specials." "White rose, sir! yessir! just picked this mornin', sir!"

Still Pem watched and waited.

Presently, as Big Ben chimed out the quarter past, a tall, fair young fellow came swinging down the steps.

Pem's face at once lost its look of eager suspense, she became almost unrecognisable.

"Well, what is it this morning? No, not a white rose—that red one—it matches your cheeks, I think," he added laughingly.

Poor Pem coloured furiously, and bit her lips; conscious of a titter among the other girls.

It was curious that she herself did not utter a word. No chaffing repartee, no preening in self-satisfaction at smile and compliment. She simply took a pin from the bosom of her dress, and, fastening the rose in its new owner's coat, took the sixpence he put into her hand.

With a pleasant inclination of his head he passed on into the Embankment Gardens. Pem's eyes followed him. Business might take care of itself. The one bright event of her day was over. Until to-morrow she would not see him again, for, for some reason, he daily returned country-wards via Victoria.

Sal Emmet had long spied upon Pem, in connection with this same recurring morning episode. Envious, spiteful, and only too well-disposed, like many another of her sex and class, to "put a spoke in the wheel" of a more fortunate sister, she bided her time to make the mischief her soul (or what passed for her soul) delighted in.

"Set 'er up! 'Oo's she? Think's the swell's gone on 'er! Yah! 'e's not such a mug as that comes to! On'y let Bill Smith get wind on it, an' there'll be ructions, you bet!"

Pem was not blind to Sal's malignancy of disposition, as toward herself; although her very spirit of blunt, reserved independence made her somewhat carelessly indifferent to anything the latter might do or say.

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It is to be feared, however, that she was allowing herself to build an airy castle, which could not possibly have foundations, of any kind whatever.

She showed this by her poor little attempts at personal adornment. A larger hat, startling effects in feathers, and other head ornament; scrupulous, or comparatively scrupulous cleanliness of skin and apron, all this marked, and plainly, the bent of her mind.

No more innocent, at ordinary times, than her mates, in the use of a forceful vocabulary, she became, for her, strangely "proper" on those rare occasions when she did condescend to conversation.

Such a course of conduct necessarily subjected her to the only too ready gibe and sneer.

"She's quite the lydy, ain't she?" said Polly Carter. "It's callin' on Queen Victoria she'll be soon, at Buckin'am Palis! My word! we'll 'ave ter 'ave a 'oliday that day, gels, won't us?"

"Cuts 'er nails, bless yer! now she does!" said Bet, from Endell Street. "Borrered my mother's scissors on'y larst night. Washes 'erself, too, every mornin' afore she comes art! She'll ruin 'erself in soap, if she don't watch it! It's sicknin'! that's what it is!"

Pem, leaning against the wall, just round the corner under the entrance to the railway arch, heard, but took no notice.

One blossom remained in her basket; a beautiful blush rose, set in its own glossy, dark green leaves.

She took it up, and pinned it in the bosom of her dress.

"'Ere, Sal!" shouted Polly Carter, "look at Pem Peth'ick. Ain't she a-goin' it? Sportin' a button-'ole! My! we are grand, we are!" and the fat, dirty-looking Polly, her greasy fringe almost touching her apology for a nose, and her tattered hat grotesquely bobbing up and down as she wagged her head wildly about, minced up and down in front of Pem, to the accompanying derisive laughter of the rest of the girls.

Pem had promised Bill that she would walk out with him that evening, and, remembering this, she retired with dignity, not deigning even a word of remonstrance or retaliation.

Contrary to his usual custom, Bill Smith did not keep his appointment. Pem was not particularly disappointed her affections never being too busily engaged, but that she could as now easily console herself for her sweetheart's failure to come up-to-time.

Alone, therefore, she wandered about nine o'clock, back to the Embankment, and, finding an unoccupied seat, gave herself up to meditative imaginings.

She had devoured much cheap, deliriously sensational literature, so dear to the soul of the lowly born, in which the "lord of high degree" poses as improbably as fascinatingly, and she quite believed in the possible repetition of the story of "King Cophetua and the beggar-maid."

She must have sat there for nearly two hours, for it was long past eleven when she reached the end of the street where she lived.

Cabs, with returning theatre-goers, were plentiful, and Pem stood for awhile at the corner of the evil-smelling narrow lane and the busy thoroughfare, idly watching the traffic.

It might have been close on midnight when a hansom, in which was a gentleman in evening dress, whirled by. Not too quickly, however, for a recognition of the occupant.

Pem would have known him anywhere, and felt her listlessness vanish.

Less than a minute afterwards, a block occurred nearer the St. Martin's Lane end of Long Acre, the line of cabs, Westward-wending, including the hansom in question, came to a momentary halt.

Pem could not resist the temptation to run the few yards, and furtively feast her eyes on the face of her idol.

She was so absorbed in this that she failed to notice a youth of the coster class steal out from the shadow of the pawnbroker's shop-doorway at the corner of the little street, and follow in her wake.

Perhaps, had she made no sign, and refrained from any exhibition of undue interest in the "gentleman of the cab," all would have been well, but unfortunately, she pressed into the roadway, between two other vehicles, her face aglow with rapturous excitement.

Action and expression were alike seen, and although road and pavement were both crowded, and before anyone knew, or could have prevented it, a report rang out, and Pem fell forward upon her face on the muddy asphalte, shot from behind.

Making no effort to escape; standing on the kerb, the smoking revolver in his hand, Bill Smith offered no resistance when seized by the police, who, it being close to Bow Street, were near at hand in considerable numbers.

He spoke but little.

"Yus, I did it. Ask Sal Emmet as lives in the same ouse as 'er—she told me, an'll tell yer why."

Meanwhile, on raising Pem, they found her alive, blood streaming from a bullet-wound in the back of her head.

A tall, fair gentleman, who sprang out of a hansom, spoke to the policeman, and said that he recognised the girl as one of whom he was in the habit of buying flowers every day at Charing Cross Station, and that if she were taken to the Hospital, he would follow, and specially interest the house-surgeon, a friend of his own, in her case. He also gave his card, and expressed his readiness to say what he knew at any future time and place.

* * * * *

Pem recovered, thanks to exceptional skill and unremitting care on the part of the doctors and friends raised up for her through the influence of Henry Cassellis.

The latter's betrothed took her into her service on her complete convalescence, and few would recognize in the pale, quiet, neat hand-maiden, the old-time flower-seller of Villiers Street.

When, soon afterwards, Henry Cassellis married, Pem went with his wife as her especial attendant, and when, too, in due course replicas of husband and wife put in an appearance, who so devoted a nurse as Pem. They loved her, those children, from the cradle; and she—she gave them all the wealth of that heart of hers, that had known so much sorrow, and learned so great a lesson.

* * * * *

Bill Smith reaped the due reward of his cowardly deed; a long period of imprisonment.

As for Sal Emmet, the other girls, with the inconsistency of girls all the world over, cut her from that day forward; and to-day, it would be dangerous to speak in their hearing, one word in dispraise or disparagement of their erstwhile object of scorn and contumely, "Pem Peth'ick."

Ralph Enderby.

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THE LION'S WARS

THE TWO FIRST GREAT MAHRATTA WARS (1802-1803).

A NOTION prevails in England, and still more in Europe, that the conquest of India by Britain led to the absorption of nationalities, abolished long seated dynasties, and did away with ancient nobilities. Our conquest did nothing of the kind, for the simple reason that when India fell into our hands there were no ancient dynasties or blue blooded aristocracies to displace in the countries we annexed.

Madhaji Scindia of Gwalior was the greatest of the Indian potentates in the last century. Whilst devoid of the cruelty which blackened the names of men like Tippoo Sahib and Surajah Dowlah, he was so inordinately ambitious that he devoted his whole life to the realisation of a scheme for the expulsion of the foreigner from India.

Scindia had, it is true, assisted us in the last Mysore war, which ended with the death of Tippoo Sahib, but that was only to lull the distrust with which he feared we were beginning to regard him. He hated us, but he had no desire to lose his country, which comprised over 33,000 square miles.

Before his death Scindia had conquered Bundelcund, occupied Agra and Delhi, reduced several of the Rajput princes, and largely extended the area of his dominions. He was succeeded by his nephew, Dowhit Rao, who, assuming the name of Scindia, took up the threads of the conspiracy.

At the beginning of the present century the Mahrattas were ruled over by three princes—Scindia, Holkar, and the Peishwa.

When the Marquis of Wellesley, the elder brother of the great general who in after years came to be known as the Duke of Wellington, became Governor General, the growing power of the Mahrattas at once attracted his attention, so as soon as the war with Mysore was concluded he endeavoured to bring the three princes under British control.

The task was not an easy one. He offered Peishwa a share of the spoils of Mysore on condition that he received in his capital a British contingent of six battalions, with guns, and set aside for their maintenance territory to the value of 26,000,000 rupees. This offer was haughtily declined. Being a man of endless patience the Marquis waited. A quarrel presently arose between Holkar and Scindia. Peishwa sided with the latter, and marched on Holkar's capital, Poona.

Although the forces of the allies exceeded 88,000 men, the victory which Holkar won October 20th, 1802, was so complete that Peishwa narrowly escaped capture before he reached Bassein.

In reply to appeals for assistance, Wellesley agreed to secure him his throne provided he became a feudatory Prince of Britain. This the Peishwa consented to do.

The treaty of Bassein, to which he affixed his signature, was greatly resented by Scindia and Holkar. Scindia especially was incensed as he saw in the treaty a death blow to his uncle's great project. The Governor, who knew nothing of Scindia's sinister plans, calculated that when Peishwa tendered his allegiance Scindia would do so, too.

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In this he was mistaken. To make matters still worse, it was reported to the Governor-General that Peishwa, repenting what he had done, had entered into an alliance with the Rajah of Berar against the British. Hostilities being now imminent, General Wellesley marched against Poona with 8,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry. Colonel Stevenson moved towards the same spot from Hyderabad with 6,000 of the Nizam's troops.

General Lake also received orders to expel Scindia's troops from Agra and Delhi, and then proceed to the assistance of General Wellesley. Ready to achieve his purpose without bloodshed, if possible, the Governor-General sent his secretary to Scindia, who declared that so far as he was concerned war depended on whether the Rajah of Nagpore joined him or not.

Even then Lord Wellesley was willing to temporise, but when he discovered for a fact that Peishwa, whom he had just reinstated at Poona, was secretly negotiating with Scindia, he declared war at once. To secure unity of purpose he invested his brother with full powers.

To gain time General Wellesley, who had marched from Seringapatam, a distance of nearly 600 miles from Poona, despatched an ultimatum to the conspirators, giving them twenty-four hours to consider the line of conduct they intended to adopt. The three princes instantly offered, if Wellesley disbanded his army, to retire thirty miles. This proposal was peremptorily rejected.

Hearing that it was the intention of the fiery Mahratta chiefs to combine their forces, General Wellesley pushed on to Poona with his cavalry, travelling so rapidly succeeded, although he had sixty miles to cover, in achieving his purpose.

On leaving Poona, Wellesley went north, taking the strongly-fortified town of Aurungabad, where, receiving information that the Mahrattas were threatening Hyderabad, the capital of our ally the Nizam, he made a forced march and got between them and the city.

The horde fighting under the banner of Scindia, although badly armed, were stubborn fighters. Existing entirely by plunder they regarded war as their natural avocation. Still, Scindia was not anxious to commence hostilities. His great uncle had so warned him to be careful of the British soldier, and not to begin unless he was certain of success. Scindia was contemplating a retreat with harassing attacks, but being reinforced by sixteen battalions of regular infantry and over seventy cannon, the whole led by French officers, he determined to risk a pitched battle.

As soon as Colonel Stevenson came up with a few thousands of the Nizam's native troops, Wellesley went in pursuit of Scindia. He was only just in time; Scindia had again changed his mind. The cavalry had gone and some of the infantry were decamping too. When the British appeared on the scene, Scindia's camp being six miles off, Wellesley was compelled to leave a strong force behind to protect his baggage and communications.

This so depleted his little army that he had only some 4,500 men, and of these large proportions were natives, to fight the huge Mahratta army of 50,000 hardy warriors. Worse still, Wellesley found the foe to his dismay encamped on the other side of the Kaitna and no ford in sight. At length one, and the only one for miles, was found. Fortunately for us it had been left unguarded. As soon as the news was brought to Wellesley he exclaimed, "I have them now, they cannot escape me."

As he was only thirty-five years of age and this was the first battle in which he had supreme command, the remark indicates the great self-reliance of the conqueror of Waterloo. As soon as our men had crossed, the battle of Assaye began. Wellesley had drawn up his men in two lines, which the French officers observing, altered the disposition of their men so that the right rested on the river and the left on the village of Assaye.

Scindia's artillery played fearful havoc in our ranks as we marched to the attack. The Nizam's troops, though well disciplined, would have run away but for a wholesome fear of their white comrades. Their courage revived, however, when they saw the calm ferocity with which the British repulsed a most determined charge of the Mahratta cavalry, who, brandishing their tasselled spears, attempted to break our ranks.

That one charge cost Scindia over 1,000 lives.

Urged by the French officers they made repeated efforts to drive us back, but as fast as our men fell other stern unyielding Britishers were ready to take their places. Wellesley was observing with delight how well the native troops, inspired by the conduct of our men, were behaving, when a miscarriage of orders nearly led to our being defeated.

The 74th, in reserve, having received orders to advance and reconnoitre, thought that it was called upon to attack. The Colonel therefore led his men against the village of Assaye, which was held by a large force of Scindia's infantry and nearly all his cavalry. The gaps in the ranks of the 74th so widened that Wellesley, ill as he could spare assistance, had to send supports in the shape of cavalry and guns. An officer galloping up reported that it would be impossible to get up the guns owing to the number of wounded men and dead oxen blocking the way.

"Tell the cavalry then that I look to them to retrieve the fortunes of the day. I know that they will not disappoint me."

There was a grim look on the faces of the troopers as they formed in line and tightened the girths of the horses.

Foreseeing what was coming, the French officers hurried up all their reserves, so that by the time we reached the lines the mass confronting us was so dense that to break through seemed hopeless. Just before the charge Wellesley rode up, the personification of calm intrepidity, attended by some scattered detachments of infantry who had followed in the wake of their chief.

The French called on their men to stand firm as we came tearing along. The Mahrattas were no cowards, but the force with which we delivered our blow made a break in the dusky wall of humanity large enough to admit of the infantry gliding in and getting to work. A desperate fight ensued, and at last, the centre growing unsteady, recoiled on the wings, which retreated in such haste that Wellesley was able to launch the 78th Highlanders, supported by a regiment of sepoy cavalry, on the rear of Scindia's quivering centre.

The Mahrattas offered a most gallant resistance, and so many of our men sank down that it became a question whether the next few minutes would leave sufficient British to complete the victory.

Wellesley noted this, too, but was quite unmoved. He knew that Scindia's horde, for all their bravery, lacked the dogged tenacity of the English; so, calling on his Highlanders, he charged again and again, driving the Mahrattas towards the Khelna to prevent them from defending their second line, which rested on the Jewah.

Simultaneously the victorious cavalry charged the

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Drawn by **The natives paused on hearing the commanding tones of the pale, stern Englishman.** *Lawson Wood.*

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village of Assaye, the 74th, which followed close behind, clearing out those who had escaped the horsemen. The two wings of Scindia, having recovered from their panic, rejoined the centre, but great as were their numbers they were also driven across the Jewah.

So far success had crowned our arms, but the battle was not yet won. Scindia's troops, instead of retreating, now took up a far stronger position than that they last occupied at Assaye. But Wellesley, who possessed the instinct only to be found in great commanders of knowing what the enemy would be likely to do, had made arrangements to defeat this move.

Before the Mahrattas crossed the Jewah he had posted a regiment of infantry near to, but out of sight of, the Mahratta position. Whilst the enemy were making ready to repel the onset of the cavalry, who had dashed across the river in pursuit, the force in hiding burst on their rear with such fury that the astonished Mahrattas took to flight.

Much still remained to be accomplished before this remarkable battle was won. Scindia's horse, numbering 30,000 men, had not yet come into action. Flushed with success it was with difficulty that our cavalry were recalled from the pursuit of the Mahratta foot to deal with the enemy's horse. For the second time that day we surprised the foe.

The Mahrattas were riding round our tiny force seeking for the weak spot when Colonel Maxwell and his troopers charged their rear. Cheered by the appearance of their General, who rode up, our brave fellows fought like lions. In less than ten minutes after this historic charge the whole of the enormous force of Mahratta horse galloped from the field hotly chased by the British, who did not pause in the pursuit till twelve miles had been covered.

This battle quite broke the spirit of our enemies in India. The town of Burhampore and the strong fortress of Alighur were so dismayed when the news reached them that they at once surrendered. Even Scindia's iron resolution so far faltered when he found our remorseless soldiers on his track as to induce him to make a pretence of suing for peace.

Wellesley then turned his attention to Bhoonsia, the Rajah of Berat. Stevenson had invested the great fortress of Gawilghur. On arriving he was confronted by the Rajah's army under the command of his brother, Vinsaji Bhoonsia.

In violation of the terms of the armistice, Scindia had sent a large body of troops to the assistance of the Rajah. Vinsaji had drawn up his army on the plain in front of the village of Argaum.

As soon as Wellesley had reconnoitred the position he resolved on an immediate attack. Our men by this time had got so used to fighting after marches of twenty miles and upwards that, although the sun's rays beat down that day with unusual fierceness, they only asked for half-an-hour's rest before attacking.

The Rajah's army was drawn up with the infantry and guns on the left centre and a body of cavalry on the left. Scindia's contingent occupied the right, with their flank covered by a body of Pindarese and other light troops.

The Rajah's position was strong but very extended. Its front occupied seven miles; still, owing to the number of water-courses which intersected it, it offered few points of attack. On account of the slowness with which the attack was developed, owing of course to infantry being employed, our Sepoys thought the battle was going against them, and began to retreat in disorder. Wellesley seeing this flew to the spot shouting to them to stop. The natives paused on hearing the commanding tones of the pale, stern Englishman, and followed him meekly back to the battlefield.

The Mahrattas, with the memory of Assaye still fresh in their minds, charged us several times, but not with the old irresistible ferocity. At this time the treachery of Scindia could not have been known, for Wellesley, in a dispatch to his brother, said: "The 74th and the 78th Regiments were attacked by a large body of strange horsemen supposed to have been Persians, and all these were destroyed."

Later in the day further reinforcements from Scindia arrived. In their first charge they encountered the first battalion of the 6th, a terrible lot of fighters, who had been stationed on the left to take charge of any fresh bodies of assailants.

Our men met the charge of the fresh arrivals with one of their own. The force of the impact was so great that the enemy were literally hurled out of the field.

As they were too demoralised to return we gave chase, capturing thirty-eight pieces of cannon and all their ammunition. The pursuit lasted for hours, and long before it was over we had captured so much plunder in the shape of elephants, camels, baggage, and war food, that the officers saw that if they continued the pursuit the spoil would have to be sacrificed.

They thereupon deputed the rest of the chase to the cavalry of the Mogul of Mysore. As the battle did not commence till late in the day our men devoted the night to recovering the elephants and camels which had wandered away.

During these exciting times Lake had been almost as successful as Wellesley. Marching from Kauhpur he fell upon the enemy's cavalry at Alighur, completely routing them. Then he stormed the fortress of Alighur, after which he marched to Delhi, defeated the Mahrattas outside the city, entering the town on the following day.

After resting a couple of days we find this active officer at Agra fighting and winning a battle for its possession. Agra and Delhi secured, Lake started for Central India in pursuit of Scindia. That wily prince, on hearing that the English were on his track, hastened his footsteps, but the English soldier, being as good a marcher as he was a fighter, overtook the enemy's army, after a series of forced marches, at Laswari, and at once assailed it with his cavalry.

Scindia's French officers had so strongly fortified the position they had taken up that Lake, after a couple of assaults, decided to wait till his infantry came up. On their appearance next morning Lake, in view of the formidable task awaiting him, decided to postpone assaulting the enemy's trenches till his men had had their dinner.

It was well he did, for in addition to the strength of the position Scindia's troops had been so well trained by the French that as Lake said, "At Laswari the Indians fought like Europeans."

The battle of Laswari displayed to the best advantage the intrepid fearlessness of the British soldier. Succeeding at last in reaching the intrenchments they calmly clambered over to receive the charge of Scindia's cavalry, the very flower of his army.

The onslaught shivered to pieces against the iron line confronting them, and after the second charge they took to flight.

On December 17th, 1803, Scindia and his chiefs signed a treaty which not only increased our prestige, but largely added to the possessions of the E.I.C.

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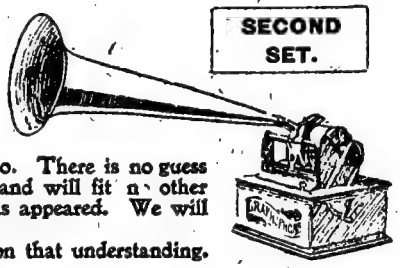
"QUICK CHANGE" PUZZLES.

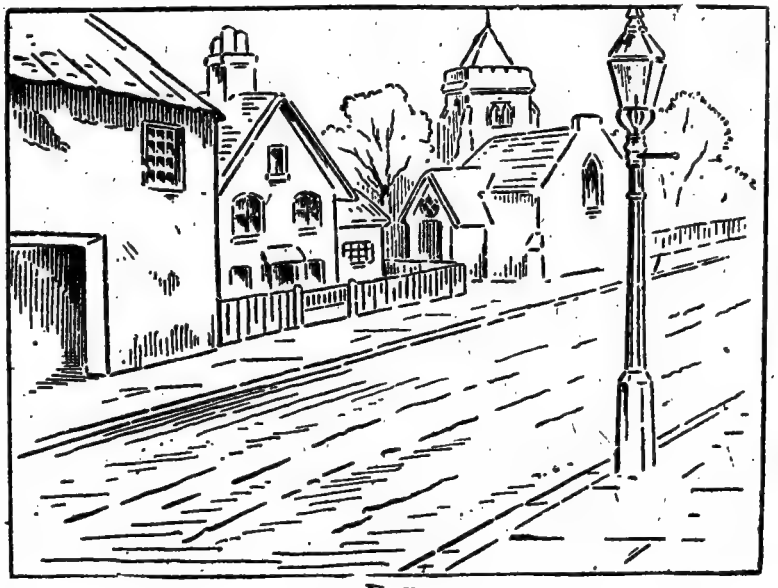
SECOND SET.



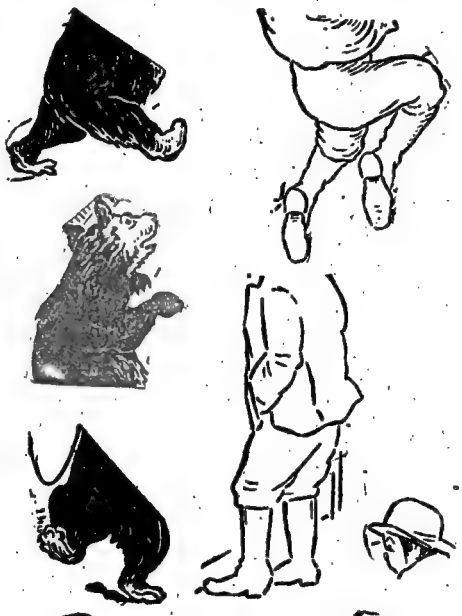
First Prize	*A Magnificent Graphophone.*
Second Prize	*£2.*
Six Prizes of	*10s. each.*

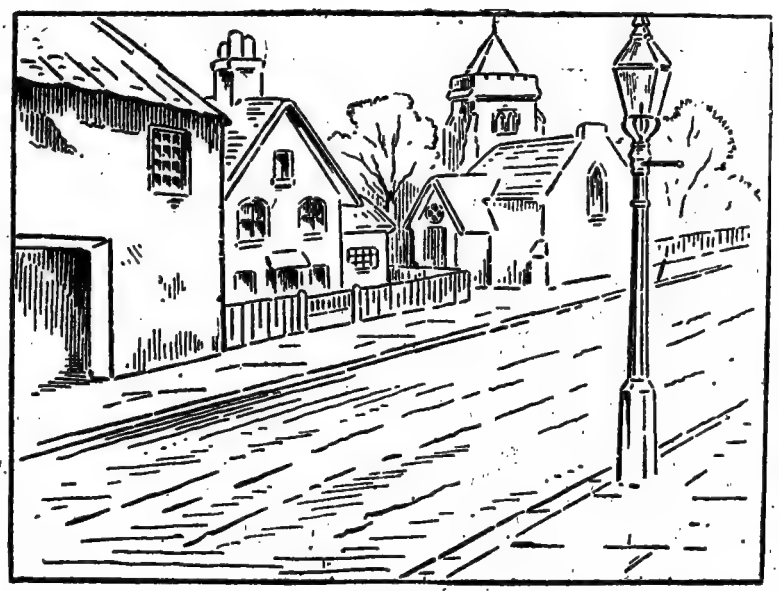
On this page you will find two drawings exactly alike, and a number of parts of figures. What you have to do is to cut out the parts of the figures, leaving a small margin, and paste them on the picture in the way they should go. There is no guess work about it. Each part of the figures should be pasted on a certain spot, and will fit no other spot. When you have pasted up your picture, put it by until one more set has appeared. We will tell you the closing date in good time.

Competitors must abide by the Editor's final decision, and may enter only on that understanding.



Fun.





Fear.

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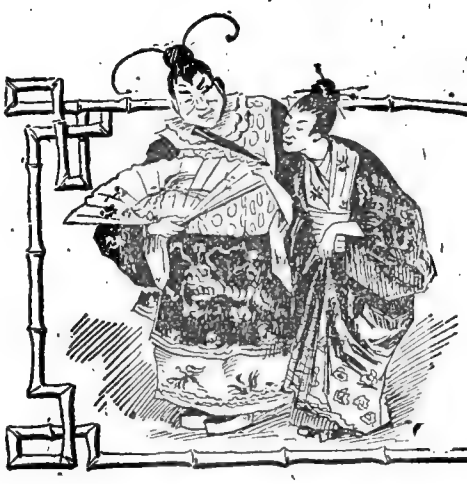

Mr. Bowser's Tribulations.

XXXII.—HE DOES A BIT OF HOUSE CLEANING WHILE MRS. BOWSER IS AWAY.

Mrs. Bowser had gone to her mother's in the country for a few days for a change of air, and Mr. Bowser and the family cat had been left at home to keep house and look after things.

Before leaving she extracted a solemn promise from him that he would not disturb things while she was absent, but on the evening before she was expected home, and while he sat just outside the door in the back-yard, a cigar in his mouth and the cat seated on another chair beside him, a sudden feeling of pity for Mrs. Bowser came over him. When she returned from her holiday, she would have to start at once on house-cleaning, and by the time she had finished, all the benefits of the country air would be dissipated.

"By George, I'll have a go at it to-morrow morning!" exclaimed Mr. Bowser as he remembered that business was a little slack and he could spare a day or two from the office. "Yes, I'll pitch in directly after breakfast and knock the socks off this house-cleaning business in less'n forty-eight hours. That little wife of mine shan't come home to break her back hunting the moths and dust out of this house."

There was a sound of gurgling and chuckling close at hand, and he turned to look at the cat. It was she, but she put on such an innocent expression that he laid the chuckling to a boy on the other side of the fence. He went to bed early to get a good start in the morning. He was alone in the house, and as he slept he dreamt that a big cat sat on his breast and grinned into his face.

At eight o'clock next morning he had coat, vest, collar and tie off and was ready for the fray. The first thing to be done, as he imagined, was to take all the parlour furniture into the back-yard and give him some room to spread himself.

He had decided that the woodwork ought to be gone over with a light coat of paint, and after getting the furniture out he went looking about for old paint cans. He had painted the verandah and the flower-pots in the summer, and he found some of the mixture left. It was a tender pink, which would have looked too lovely for anything on the cheeks of a bride, but it needed thinning down.

He knew that practical painters never used water, vinegar, cold tea or coffee to thin out paint, but his knowledge stopped short there. It was when his eye rested on the paraffin can that he solved the puzzle.

When the paint had been duly prepared for use, a little oil was added from the sewing machine can to give it a gloss, and Mr. Bowser went to work.

It takes some men years to become an artist with the brush. It didn't take him over ten minutes. The peach-colour not only stood out over the white groundwork, but the oil brought out a real bloom on the peaches.

As he stood back and surveyed his first door he could almost imagine that he saw rare ripe peaches hanging to trees out in the country. The odour wasn't exactly agreeable, but he decided to throw that in free gratis and for nothing. It was a job that would have taken an average painter a full day, with his going to the shop for putty, and sandpaper and round the corner for beer, but at noon Mr. Bowser stood in the middle of the room and put out his tongue and looked about him and saw that his work was finished.

In addition to the bloom on the peach-colour, the oil had brought out thousands of bubbles, but he did not regard them as drawbacks. On the contrary, he rather prided himself on having struck something new in the line of high art painting.

* * * *

Mrs. Bowser had complained of moths. Yes, he remembered that she had been fighting moths for years and that it had been hard work to keep them down. Whether she had used the axe, the crowbar, or hot water, he could not remember, but she had slaughtered them without pity and left their corpses unburied.

Before he went out to a restaurant for his lunch he made a hunt for moths, and his search was ably seconded by the cat. It was the cat who finally found one hiding in a dark corner, and Mr. Bowser's resolution was taken.

The moths or the carpets or

As he slept he dreamt that a big cat sat on his breast.

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something must be exterminated. He didn't go to a chemist's when he went out and ask for a remedy. Believing that a waiter in a restaurant ought to know all about moths, he confided his troubles to the man and was answered:

"Yes, sir, I can tell you what to do. I've known all about moths ever since I was knee high to Tom Thumb. You want to sprinkle that carpet with a compound made of water, lime and paraffin. Make up about six gallons of it and don't be stingy about putting it on. The idea is to kill the moths all at once and have no long drawn out suffering about the house."

* * * *

Mr. Bowser got the ingredients and made a six gallon saucepan full, and then, taking the garden watering can he went over the carpet and started every moth on the fly out of the neighbourhood. After the cat had walked across the carpet once she also started, and it was late in the afternoon before she returned with sore feet and a reproachful look.

When the sprinkling had been finished and just as the back parlour was to be attacked, a tramp rang the doorbell and asked for something to eat. Mr. Bowser felt complacent and liberal hearted. In place of food he gave the man sixpence and then said:

"I don't claim to be a professional artist, but I've just finished a little job here I'd like you to look at. In travelling about you must see more or less artistic work."

"I do, sir," replied the tramp as he followed him into the parlour and looked at the freshly-painted woodwork. "This is what I calls a beauty, sir, a real beauty. You've used paraffin and oil with the paint, and the neighbours will all be jealous of you. You should have been an artist, sir."

There was a tinge of sarcasm in his tones, but Mr. Bowser added another sixpence and bowed him out.

It was now noticed that the blue and red in the carpet began to look freckled, but there was no time to investigate. The furniture of the other room was hurried into the back-yard, and the work of putting on the peach-colour began.

* * * * *

Mr. Bowser had been painting and admiring for an hour when he heard the dull rumble of thunder. His artistic soul was not disturbed by it, nor did he heed the rain which presently began to pour down and continued for two hours. When he had finished his painting, he made another mixture of moth-killer and drenched the carpet of that room as well, and he chuckled with satisfaction as he imagined the mob of moths fleeing with terror, like the Boxers before the allied army. He had just got through and was contemplating his work with the satisfaction of a good husband when Mrs. Bowser arrived and came in to him.

"Welcome home, my dear," he said as he extended his painty arms.

She didn't rush into them. She looked at the bubbling painted woodwork, at the freckled carpets, out of the window at the upholstered furniture which had soaked for two hours in the back yard, and then she sat down on the floor and started crying.

M. QUAD.

"I've just finished a little job I'd like you to look at."

[NEXT WEEK.—*He Buys a Fire Extinguisher and Proceeds to Extinguish.*]

MOTHER: "Did you try to make yourself agreeable at Mrs. Hightone's?"

Little Daughter: "Yes, mamma; I told her all the funny things our callers said about her, and she seemed to be so much interested."

"WE'LL miss the play," she said impatiently. "We've been waiting a good many minutes for that mother of mine."

"Hours, I should say," he replied somewhat acrimoniously.

"Ours?" cried she rapturously. "Oh, George, this is so sudden."

LADY OF THE HOUSE: "Listen, cook. I am going to give a supper and a dance. Now, you will have to show what you can do, so as to keep up the credit of my establishment."

Cook: "With pleasure, ma'am; but I can only dance the waltz and the polka. You will have to excuse me from the quadrilles."

THE priest had been giving Pat and Nancy a little advice on some differences of opinion that had sprung up between them. And to illustrate his remarks he pointed to a dog and cat sleeping together by the fireside.

"See, my children, how agreeable these two little animals are."

"Yes, your Reverence," replied the woman; "but tie them together, and you'll see what they'll do."

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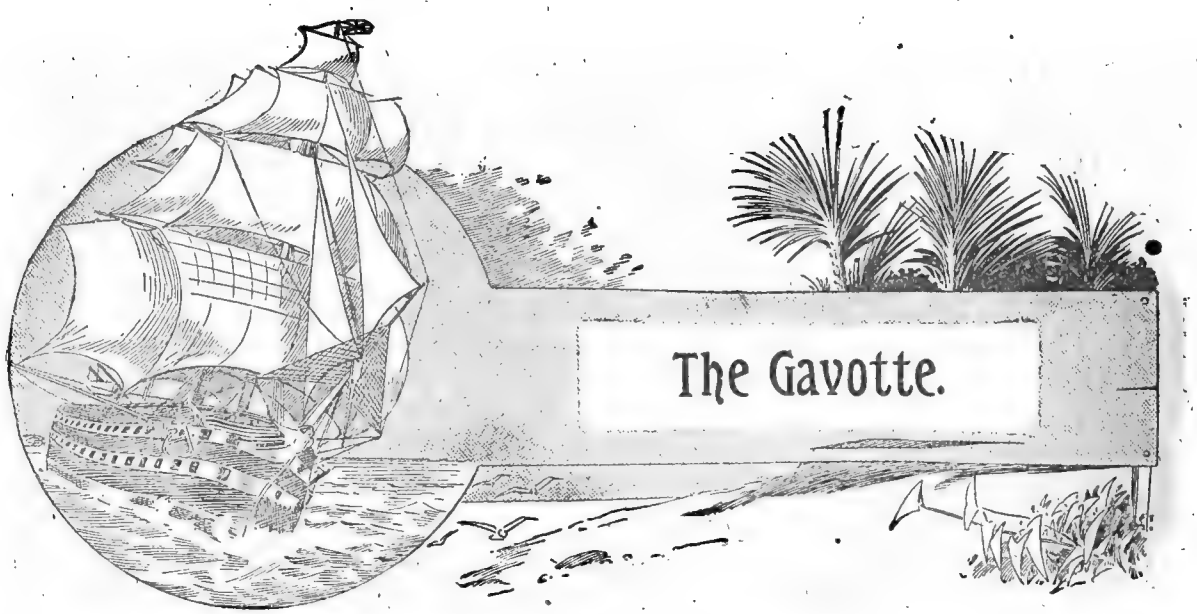

The Gavotte.

THE worthy curé of Chauvigny knocked somewhat hesitatingly at the door of the spacious room in which he knew that the still more worthy bishop of his diocese was about to partake of his plain mid-day meal. In answer to a loud invitation to walk in, he opened the door and entered.

"Ha, my dear curé, you are very welcome!" cried the prelate heartily. "That is," he added hastily, "provided that you have not come to ask me to pardon your graceless nephew."

"Monseigneur, I trust that I shall be none the less welcome on that account, for that is precisely the object of my visit," responded the curé humbly, as he approached the other and bowed.

"Then I am afraid that your visit will not be a success," returned the bishop.

He spoke with determination, but there was something in his tone and manner that showed affability to the uncle as well as severity towards the nephew.

"Your nephew is a pupil at the seminary and I was hoping, quite as much as you, my dear friend, that he would become a member of the clergy. Now, what happens? He has to leave the institution to do his six months' military service; just as he is leaving he goes to a dance—and not only dances with a pretty girl, but also kisses the hand of that pretty girl at the conclusion of the dance! You see," shaking an admonitory finger at the curé, "I am well informed."

"But, monseigneur——"

"I tell you," continued the prelate, still shaking his forefinger vigorously, "that your nephew, when he has done his six months, had better enlist or settle down and marry; I fear that as a member of the clergy he might be flighty." And the speaker shook his head slowly, as if in grave apprehension.

"I hope that you will deign to reconsider your decision, monseigneur," pleaded the visitor. "If you persist, Jeannet's career will be spoilt; he is intended by nature for the priesthood and is devoted to the calling. He is young and, although I have no wish to palliate his offence, yet I must say that there is no wrong in the lad. It was a slip."

"No more; let us leave the subject," was the reply.

"My good friend, I am delighted to see you and I must ask you to do me the further pleasure of sharing my dinner. It will be ready directly, and in the meantime you must take this arm-chair—you'll find it a comfortable one—and draw it up closer to the fire. That's it. There, you will be quite close to the table and will merely have to draw the front legs round a few inches when my old servant brings in the dinner. But I cannot promise you a royal feast; I live very plainly. I know that you, my dear curé, in your secluded parish, have a better time of it than I do."

"I agree with you," replied Jeannet's uncle with conviction. "I know by experience that, despite your exalted position, you do not have the good things which fall to my lot. My parishioners love me and they keep me well supplied with such things as one gets more easily in the country than in the town. In fact, they keep me too well supplied, and I am able to bring some of the delicacies for monseigneur. I handed them to your servant, Marion, when I came in—some trout, two partridges and a dozen of wine. Some of the fish and one partridge are cooked, and I took the liberty of asking your servant to put them on the table. A cold repast, certainly, but none the less enjoyable."

Before the bishop could speak, the door opened and Marion came in with a tray. The dinner was served and the two men seated themselves at the table and lost no time in beginning the attack on the food placed before them.

"A dinner for a king!" exclaimed the prelate with the most evident enjoyment. He was a good man, giving away a large portion of his small stipend in charity and living in the simplest manner; he did not often sit down to a dinner like that.

The meal finished, both men lay back in their chairs and felt happy; the fish had been good, the partridge had equalled it in excellence and the wine had, at least, not been inferior to the comestibles in quality.

"My dear curé, you must not come to see me often if you bring such things with you, or you will tempt me into the wish to change places."

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"I have something more than those to console me for my seclusion. I play the flute, and I find in that instrument a charming companion."

"I have been given to understand that you are a most expert player. When I come your way, I shall insist upon hearing you."

"My friends exaggerate my skill," said the curé modestly, almost shyly. Yet there was a certain eagerness in his manner. "I have my flute with me, and I should like to show you exactly what I can do, but I fear that you would think it a mere noise, not music."

"By all means give us a selection," cried the bishop, taking another sip at the wine. "There is nothing I should like better, and I should not be surprised if the playing attracted my old servant into this room on the pretext of clearing the table—she is fond of music. Come, come; Don't be shy! Out with the instrument and begin!"

The curé, with seeming timidity, produced the flute from the recesses of his coat and began to play.

As the bishop had predicted, Marion appeared in the doorway before many bars had been played, but neither her master nor the curé noticed her at first; the bishop was charmed by the music, and the player was too occupied in producing it, and in watching his superior.

The curé was an excellent performer; he made the instrument give forth full, rich tones, and he moved his fingers with the dexterity of a skilled player. Suddenly the bishop discovered that the curé was rendering an old-fashioned gavotte and his attention increased.

"Ah," he exclaimed, speaking softly in order not to utter the remark audibly.

"How well I remember that gavotte! What memories it recalls! It takes me back to the old days in Auvergne; many a time have I danced to that tune!" and his feet kept time to the tune.

"You could not dance it now, monseigneur," cried the curé, stopping in his playing to make the observation. "Your legs have grown too stiff for that."

"Nonsense," exclaimed the prelate. "Anybody would fancy I was a centenarian to hear you talk. Can't dance it now indeed! If I had a partner I'd show you!"

He looked about the great room with a face flushed with vexation and his eyes fell upon Marion standing in the doorway.

"You'll do, Marion!" he cried to the old woman. "Do you know how to dance the gavotte? A little? Come here, I'll show you how to do it. Play up!" he continued, turning again to the curé. "You shall see!"

Again the notes of the flute sounded in the room. Marion, quite flustered at this unexpected turn of events, approached her master diffidently; he took her hand and showed her what to do.

"Lift this foot," so ran the instruction. "Now the other—like this; now whirl round. A little skip, then round you go again. Now catch hold of the fold of your dress and bow. Very good!"

The curé continued to play, and the next minute the bishop and his elderly domestic were dancing with great vigour.

Round the room they went, the curé putting more wind into the instrument as they receded, and playing *diminuendo* as they returned. They kept it up until the dancers were out of breath and tired, when the music finished with a triumphant swell.

"Splendid!" cried the bishop. Then, with the utmost gallantry, he raised Marion's shrivelled hand to his lips.

"Monseigneur!" exclaimed the curé, in pretended horror. "Why, you have committed the same sin as my nephew!"

"What do you mean?" asked his superior in amazement.

"You have been dancing and you have kissed your partner's hand," replied the other. "I fear me as a member of the clergy you are likely to become too flighty!"

"But it is quite different!" protested the bishop. "I—that is——"

"Yes, it is very different. Just imagine yourself thirty years younger, with a good band instead of an old flute, with youthful blood in your veins and with a pretty partner instead of a wrinkled dame arrived at years of discretion. Think of the enjoyment you have just had, and then imagine yourself in the other circumstances which I have just mentioned. Ah, it was excusable on the part of Jeannet, and you must pardon him,"

The bishop looked perplexed and vexed; he did not wish to be hard on anyone, but he had his calling much at heart. Still, he was fairly caught, and, when he saw the sly twinkle in the eyes of the curé, he laughed good-humouredly, and yielded.

"I'm afraid that you are a very cunning old man, my dear curé," he said with a smile. "Very well, we will look over the little indiscretion of your nephew, and you may tell him he is forgiven. But neither of us must lapse again!"

CHARLES FOLEY.

"If anyone should call this afternoon, Mary, say that I am not well," said a mistress to her newly-engaged servant. "I'm afraid I ate a little too much of that rich pudding for lunch, and it, or something else, has brought on a severe headache. I am going to lie down."

A few moments later the mistress, from her room near the head of the stairs, heard Mary say to two aristocratic ladies who called for the first time:

"Yes'm, Mrs. Browne is at home, but she ate so much pudding for lunch she had to go to bed."

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THE LOST LADY DELIA.

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

Lady Delia Lyle leaves her house one foggy November afternoon, and is seen at Victoria Station, on the Underground Railway, by Mr. Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of her husband, who gets her ticket and puts her in the train for Richmond, where she says she is going to see her sister.

She does not return home at night, so in the morning her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, wires to her at her sister's, only to find that she has not been there.

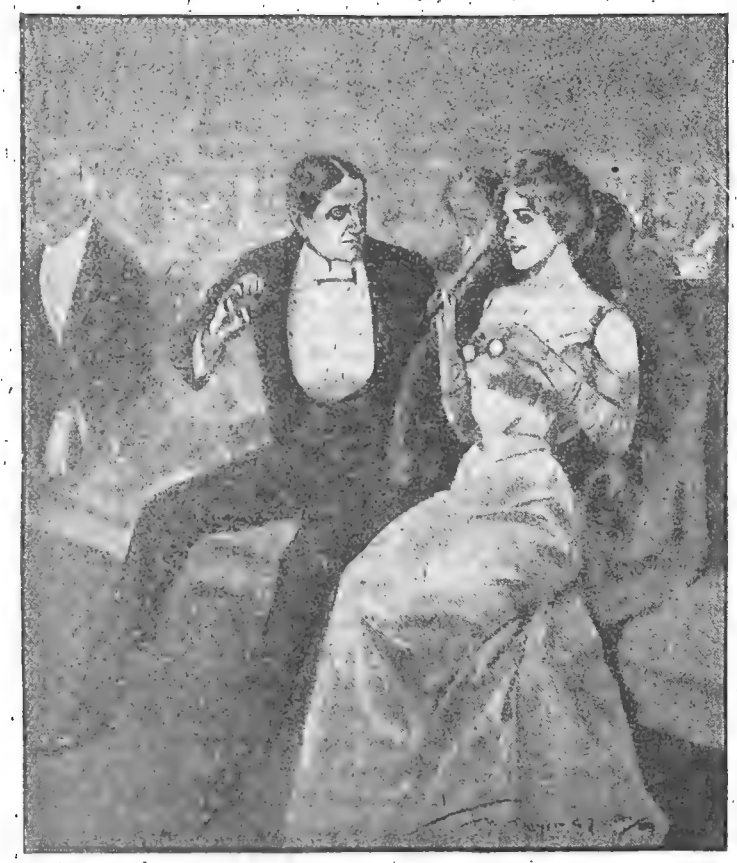
Later in the day Brett happens to meet Sir Charles, and tells him that he saw Lady Delia on the previous evening, and is surprised to learn that nothing has been heard of her since.

After some days have passed, without bringing any news of Lady Delia, Sir Charles puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Brett also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hillmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister, and with this lady Brett arranges to dine and spend the evening at the theatre.



"Fie, Mr. Brett. You are taking altogether too much notice of one of the fair ladies in front."

CHAPTER V.

At the Jollity Theatre

By tacit consent, Reggie and his fair companion dropped for the hour, the rôles of inquisitor and witness.

They were both excellent talkers, they were mutually interested, and there was in their present escapade a spice of that romance not so wholly wanting in the humdrum life of London as is generally supposed to be the case.

Brett did not ask himself what tangible result he expected from this quaint outcome of his visit to Sloane Square. It was too soon yet. He must trust to the vagaries of chance to elucidate many things now hidden. Meanwhile a good dinner, a bright theatre, and the society of a smart, nice-looking woman were more than tolerable substitutes for progress.

As a partial explanation of his somewhat eccentric behaviour he volunteered a lively account of a recent *cause célèbre*, in which he had taken a part, but the details of which had been rigidly kept from the public. He more than hinted that Mr. Sydney Pyne had figured prominently in the affair; and Mrs. Hillmer laughed with unrestrained mirth at the unwonted appearance of her brother in the character of a Lothario.

"Tell me," said Brett, confidentially, when a couple of glasses of Moët '89 had consolidated their friendly relations, "what sort of fellow is this brother of yours?"

"Not in any sense a bad boy, but a trifle wild. He will not live an ordinary life, and at times he has been hard pressed to live at all. As a matter of fact, it is this scrape he got into with Messrs. Dodge and Co. that induced him temporarily to masquerade under an assumed name."

"Then what is his real name?"

"Ah, now you are pumping me again. I refuse to tell."

"But they are generally serious reasons that induce a man to disguise himself in such fashion."

"The reason he gave me was that he dreaded being writted for liability regarding the shares I mentioned to you. It was good enough. Now you come with this story of meddling with somebody else's wife. Surely that is an additional reason. I supplied him with funds until we quarrelled, and then he went off in a huff."

"What did you quarrel about?"

"That concerns me only." Mrs. Hillmer was so emphatic that Brett dropped the subject. When they drove to the theatre Mrs. Hillmer, on alighting at the entrance, said to her coachman, "You can return home now, and bring Dobson to meet me at 11.15."

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"May I venture to inquire who Dobson is?" said Reggie.

"Certainly. Dobson is my maid."

This woman puzzled Brett the more he saw of her. He was now quite positive that she lived on the fringe of Society. Her status was, at the best, dubious. Yet he had never heard of her before, nor met her in public. None of his friends were known to her, and she mentioned no one beyond those popular personages who are known to all the world. She was obviously wealthy and refined, with more than a spice of unconventionality. At times, too, beneath her habitual expressions of lively and vivacious interest, there was a touch of melancholy.

For an instant her face became even sad when her eyes rested on a typical family party of father, mother, and two girls who occupied seats in the row of stalls directly in front of her.

For some reason, Brett felt sorry for Mrs. Hillmer. He regretted that the exigencies of his quest forced him to make her his dupe, and he resolved that, if by any chance her scapegrace brother were concerned in Lady Delia's death, Mrs. Hillmer should, if possible, be spared personal humiliation or disgrace.

Indeed, he had formed such a favourable opinion of her that he had made up his mind to conduct his future investigations without causing her to involuntarily assist in putting a halter round her relative's neck.

Nevertheless, it was impossible to avoid getting some further information, as the lady herself paved the way for it. Her comments betrayed such an accurate acquaintance with the technique of the stage that Reggie said to her, "You must have acted a good deal?"

"No," she said, "not very much. But I was stage-struck when young."

"But you have not appeared in public?"

"Yes, some six years ago. I worked so hard that I fell ill, and then—then I got married."

"Do you go out much to theatres, nowadays?"

"Very little. It is lonely by oneself, and there are so few plays worth seeing."

Brett wondered why she insisted so strongly upon the isolation of her existence. In his new-found sympathy he forbore to question, and she continued:—

"When I do visit a theatre I amuse myself mostly by silent criticism of the actors and actresses. Not that I could do better than most of them, or half so well, but it passes the time."

"I hope that you do not regard killing time as your main occupation?"

"It is so, I fear, however hard I may strive otherwise." And again that shadow of regret darkened the fair face.

Someone in front turned round and glared at them angrily, for the famous comedian, Mr. Prospect Ricks, was singing his deservedly famous song, "It was all because I buttoned up her boots," so the conversation dropped for the moment.

Reggie focussed his opera-glasses on the stage. Whilst his eyes wandered idly over the pretty faces and shapely limbs of the coryphées his brain was busy piecing together all that he had heard. The odd coincidence of the dates of Lady Delia's murder and the speedy departure of the self-styled Sydney Pyne for the Riviera would require a good deal of explanation by the latter gentleman.

True, it was not Brett's method to jump at conclusions. There might be a perfectly valid motive for the journey. If the man did not desire his whereabouts to be known, why did he leave his adddress at the post-office?

And, then, what possible reason could Lady Delia have in voluntarily and secretly visiting him at his chambers in Raleigh Mansions? This virtuous and high-principled lady could have nothing in common with a careless adventurer, taking the most lenient view of his sister's description of him. And as Brett's subtle brain strove vainly to match the queer fragments of the puzzle, his keen eyes roved over the stage in aimless activity.

He strove to shield his portly form in the portico of a neighbouring restaurant.

Suddenly they paused. Brett's powers of vision and mental analysis were alike inadequate to the new and startling fact that had obtruded itself, unasked and unsought for, upon his sight.

Among the least prominent of the chorus girls, posturing and moving with the uneasy motions and visible anxiety of the novice who is not yet accustomed to the glare of the footlights upon undraped limbs, was one in whose every gesture Brett took an absorbing interest.

He was endowed in full measure with that prime requisite in the detection of criminals, an unusually good memory for faces, together with the artistic faculty of catching the true expression of anyone he had once seen for any length of time.

Hence it was that, after the whirl of a dancing chorus had for a few seconds brought this particular member of the company close to the proscenium, Brett became quite sure of having at least developed one branch of his inquiry within measurable distance of its conclusion.

The girl on the stage was Jane Harding, Lady Delia's maid.

When her features first flashed upon his conscious gaze he could hardly credit the discovery. But each instant of prolonged scrutiny placed the fact beyond doubt. Not even the make up and the elaborate wig could conceal the contour of her pretty if insipid features, and a slight trick she had of drooping the left eyelid when thinking, confirmed him in his belief.

So astounded was he at this sequel to his visit to the theatre that he utilised every opportunity of a full stage to still further examine the appearance and style of this strange apparition.

When the curtain fell and Jane Harding had temporarily vanished he was brought back to actuality by Mrs. Hillmer's voice:

"Fie, Mr. Brett. You are taking altogether too much notice of one of the fair ladies in front. Which one is it?

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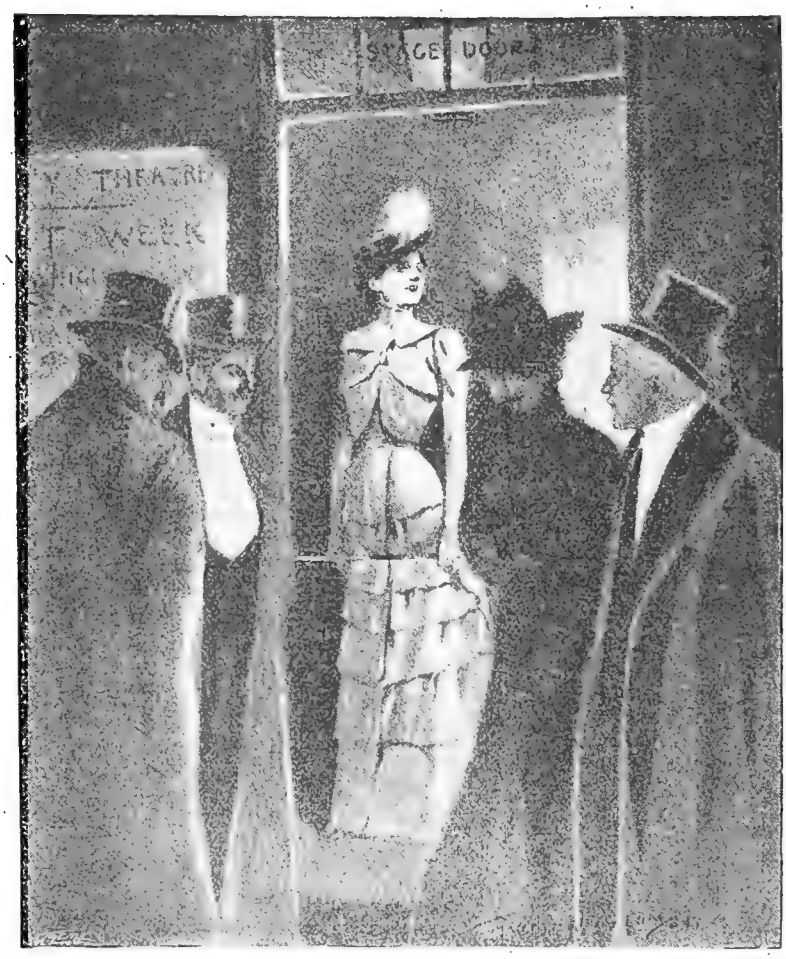

At last the lady's maid appeared, dressed in a showy winter costume.

The tall standard-bearer or the little girl who pirouettes so gracefully?"

"Neither, I assure you. I was most taken up by wondering how a young woman manages to get employment in a theatre for the first time."

"I think I can tell you. Influence goes a long way. Talent occasionally counts. Then, a well-known agent can, for a fee, get an opening for a handsome, well-built girl who has taken lessons from either himself or some of his friends in dancing or singing, or both."

"Is such a thing possible for a domestic servant?"

"It all depends upon the domestic servant's circle of acquaintances. As a rule, I should say not. A theatre like this requires a higher average of intelligence."

This, and more, Reggie well knew, but he was only making conversation, whilst he thought intently, almost fiercely, upon the latest phase that had presented itself.

During the third act he devoted more time to Mrs. Hillmer. If that sprightly dame was a little astonished at the celerity with which he conducted her to her carriage and the waiting Dobson, it was banished by the nice way in which Reggie thanked her for the pleasure she had conferred upon him.

"The enjoyment has been mostly on my side," she cried, as he stood near the window of her brougham. "Come and see me again soon."

He bowed, and would have said something if an imperious policeman had not ordered the coachman to make way for the next vehicle. As it was, Mrs. Hillmer vanished into the traffic.

From force of habit, Brett glanced casually at the crowd struggling through the exit of the theatre, and he caught sight of Mr. Winter, who, too late, averted his round eyes and strove to shield his portly form in the portico of a neighbouring restaurant.

Reggie did not want to be bothered by the detective just then. He methodically lit a cigarette, and Mr. Winter slid off quietly into the stream of traffic, finally crossing the road and jumping on to a Charing Cross 'bus.

"So," said Reggie to himself, "Winter has been watching Raleigh Mansions, and me too. 'Pon my honour, I shouldn't wonder if he suspected me of the murder! I'm glad I saw him just now. For the next couple of hours I don't want any thick-headed detectives interfering with me."

Waiting for a few moments to make sure that Winter had not detailed an aide-de-camp to continue the surveillance, Brett fastened his overcoat to the chin, tilted his hat forward, and strolled round to the stage-door of the Jollity Theatre.

CHAPTER VI.

Miss Marie-le Marchant.

The uncertain rays from a weak lamp, struggling through panes dulled by dirt and black letters, cast a fitful light about the precincts of the stage-door.

Elderly women and broken-down men, mostly slovenly and unkempt, kept furtive guard on the exit, waiting for the particular "super" to come forth who would propose the expected adjournment to a favourite public-house. Some smart broughams, a four-wheeler, and a few hansoms, formed a close line along the pavement, which was soon crowded with the hundred odd hangers-on of a theatre—scene-shifters, gasmen, limelight men, members of the orchestra, dressers, and attendants—mingling with the small stream of artistes constantly pouring out into the cold night after a casual inquiry for letters at the office of the doorkeeper.

This being a fashionable place of amusement there were not wanting several representatives of the gilded youth, some obviously ginger-bread or "unleavened" imitations, others callow specimens of the genuine article.

Brett paid little heed to these as they impudently peered beneath each broad-leafed and high-feathered hat to discover the particular favourite honoured by their chivalrous attentions.

Yet the presence of this light-headed brigade of cavaliers helped the barrister far more than he could have foreseen or even hoped.

At last the ex-lady's maid appeared, dressed in a showy winter costume and jaunty toque. She was on very friendly terms with two older girls, on whom the stage had set its ineffaceable seal, and the reason was soon apparent.

"Come along," she cried, her words being evidently intended to have an effect on others in the throng less favoured than those whom she addressed; "let us get into a hansom and go to Scott's for supper. Here, cabby!"

She was on the step of a hansom when a tall, good-looking

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boy, faultlessly dressed, and with something of Sandhurst or "the Shop" in his carriage, darted forward.

"Hallo, Milly," he said to one of Jane Harding's companions. "How are you? A couple of fellows have come up on leave with me for the night. Let's all go and have something to eat at the Duke's," thereby indicating a well-known club usually patronised by higher class artistes than this trio.

After a series of introductions by Christian names, amongst which Brett failed to catch the word "Jane," the party went off in three hansoms, a pair in each.

Reggie was not a member of the "Duke's," though he had often been there. But there was a man close at hand who was a member of everything in London that in any way pertained to things theatrical. Everyone knew Billy Sadler, and Billy Sadler knew everyone. A brief run in a cab to a theatre, a restaurant, and another restaurant, revealed the large-hearted Billy, drinking a whisky and soda and relating to a friend, with great gusto and much gesticulation, the very latest quarrel between the stage-manager and the leading lady.

"'Pon my soul, Brett, old chap, haven't seen you for an age. Where have you bin? An' what's the little game now?"

Mr. Sadler was fully aware of the barrister's penchant for investigating mysteries. The two had often foregathered in the past.

"Are you busy?" said Brett.

"Not a bit. By-bye, Jack. See you at luncheon to-morrow at the Gorgonzola. Well, what is it?"

"I want you to come with me to the 'Duke's.' There is a young lady there I'm interested in."

Billy squeezed round in the hansom, which was now bowling across a corner of Trafalgar Square.

"You!" he cried. "After a girl! Is she in the profession? Has mamma got frightened about her angel? The correct figure for breach just now, my boy, is five thou'."

"Oh, it's nothing serious. I will tell you all about it when matters have cleared a bit. This is a mere item in a really big story. But, here we are. Take me straight to the supper room."

As they entered the comfortable, brightly-lit club the strains of a band came pleasantly to their ears, and in a minute they were installed at a corner table in the splendid room devoted to the most cheery of all gatherings—a Bohemian meal when the labours of the night are past.

Brett soon marked his quarry. Jane Harding was in great form—eating, drinking, and talking at the same time.

"Who is that, Billy?" said Brett, indicating the object of his question.

Sadler carefully balanced his pince-nez on his well-defined nose, gazed at the girl, and laughed: "Goodness knows. She's a new-comer, and not much at the best. Do you know where she carries a banner?"

"At the Jollity."

"Oh! then here's our man"—for a Mephistophelian gentleman was passing at the moment. "Say, Rosenheim, who's the new coryphée over there?"

Mephistopheles halted, looked at Jane and laughed. "Her name is Miss Marie le Marchant; but as she happened to be born in London she pronounces it Mahrie Lee Mahshunt, with the accent on the 'Mahs.' Anything else you would like to know?"

"Yes, I'm stuck on her! Where did you pick her up?"

"She's a housemaid, or something of the sort. Come into money. Want's to knock 'em on the stage. That is easy."

"Say, Rosenheim, who's the new coryphee over there?"

"Has she been with you long?" put in Reggie, as their informant was the under-manager of the Jollity.

Mr. Rosenheim glanced at Brett. Sadler, he knew, had no interest in the girl, and the barrister did not quite possess the juvenile appearance that warranted such solicitude.

"She joined us just before Christmas. What's up? Is she really worth a lot of 'oof?"

"I should imagine not," laughed Brett; and Mr. Rosenheim joined another group.

Supper ended, Marie, and Millie, and eke Flossie, attended by their swains, discussed coffee and cognac in the foyer.

Chance separated Miss le Marchant, as she may now be known, momentarily from the others, and Brett darted forward.

"Good evening," he said. "I am delighted to meet you here."

The girl recognised him instantly. She would have denied her identity, but her nerve failed her before those steadfast, penetrating eyes. Moreover, it was not an ill thing for such a well-bred, well-dressed man to acknowledge her so openly.

"Good evening, Mr. Brett," she said, with a smile of assurance, though her voice faltered a little.

Reggie resolved to make the situation easy.

"We have not met for such a long time," he said; "and I am simply dying to have a talk with you. I am sure your friends will pardon me if I carry you off for five minutes to a quiet corner."

With a simper Miss le Marchant took his proffered arm, and they went off to an unoccupied table

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"Now, Jane Harding," said Brett, with some degree of sternness in his manner, "be good enough to explain to me why you are passing under a false name and the reasons which led you to leave Sir Charles Lyle's house in such a particularly disagreeable way."

"Disagreeable? I only left in a hurry. Who had any right to stop me?"

"No one, in a sense, except that Sir Charles Lyle may feel inclined to prosecute you."

"For what, Mr. Brett?"

This emancipated servant girl was not such a simpleton as she looked. It was necessary to frighten her and at the same time to get her to admit the facts with reference to her sensational flight from Wensley House.

"You must know," said Reggie, "that Sir Charles Lyle can at least proceed against you in the County Court to recover wages in lieu of notice, and this would be far from pleasant for you in your new surroundings."

"Yes, I know that. But why should Sir Charles Lyle, or you, or any other gentleman, want to destroy a poor girl's prospects in that fashion?"

"Surely, you must feel that some explanation is due to us for your extraordinary behaviour?"

"No, I don't feel a bit like it."

"But why did you go away?"

"To suit myself."

"Could you not have given notice? Why was it necessary to create a further scandal in addition to the disappearance of your unfortunate mistress?"

"I am sorry for that. It was thoughtless, I admit. If I had to act over again I should have done differently. But what does it matter now?"

"It matters this much—that the police must be informed of your existence, as they are searching for you, believing that you are in some way mixed up with Lady Delia's death."

The girl started violently, and she flushed, rather with anger than alarm, Brett thought, as he watched her narrowly.

"The police, indeed," she snorted; "What have the police to do with me? A nice thing you're saying, Mr. Brett."

"I am merely telling you the naked truth."

"All right. Tell them. I don't care a pin for them or you. Have you anything else to say, because I wish to join my friends?"

The girl's language and attitude mystified Brett more than any preceding feature of this remarkable investigation. She was, of course, far better educated than he had imagined, and the difference between the hysterical witness at the coroner's inquiry and this pert, self-possessed young woman was phenomenal.

Rather than risk an open rupture the barrister temporised. "If you are anxious to quarrel with me, by all means do so," he said; "but that was not my motive in speaking to you here to-night."

Miss le Marchant shot a suspicious glance at him. "Then what was your motive, Mr. Brett?" she said.

"Chiefly to reassure my friend, Sir Charles Lyle, concerning you; and, perhaps, to learn the reasons for your certainly very strange conduct."

"Why should Sir Charles bother his head about me?"

"As I have told you. Because of the coincidence between your departure and Lady ——"

"Oh, yes, I know that." Then she added testily: "I *was* a fool not to manage differently."

"So you refuse me any explanation?"

"No, I don't. I have no reason to do so. I came in for some money, and as I have all my life longed to be an actress I could not wait an hour, a moment, before I—before I——"

"Before you tried to gratify your impulse."

"Yes, that is what I wanted to say."

"But why not at least have written to Sir Charles Lyle, telling him of your intentions?"

The fair Marie was silent for a moment. The question confused her. "I hardly know," she replied.

"Will you write to him now?"

"I don't see why I should."

"Indeed. Not even when it was you who gave some of Lady Delia's underclothes to Mr. Winter, by which means he was able to identify the body found at Putney as that of your mistress?"

She bounced up, fiery red, pluming herself for the fray.

"Mr. Winter told you that, did he?"

"He did."

"Then you had better get him to give you all further information, Mr. Brett, as not another word will you get out of me."

She bounced up, fiery red, pluming herself for the fray.

"Will you not communicate with Sir Charles Lyle?" said Brett, utterly baffled by Miss le Marchant's uncompromising attitude.

"Perhaps I will and perhaps I won't. Mr. Winter, indeed!" And off she ran to join her friends.

The barrister drove quietly home to his chambers. This was his summary of the evening's events: "I have found two women. When I know all about them I shall be able to lay my hand on the person who killed Lady Delia."

(To be continued.)

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SHORT STORIES ABOUT TORTOISES.

We devote, every week, two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Heronford," by S. R. Keightley, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case the source *must* be stated. The prize of One Guinea offered for the best Storyette in this competition has been won this week by Mr. John Whitaker, 40 St. Andrew's Terrace, Bradford. Attempts this week must deal with Stories about ANY SUBJECT, and must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, December 31st. Post-cards only, please.

Then Hoskins Exploded.

THE other day, Hoskins brought home a tortoise; while the same week Mrs. Hoskins brought home a new servant.

A few days after this, just as Mr. Hoskins was settling down for his after-dinner nap, in walked Mary with the tortoise in one hand, and a small key in the other.

"If you please, sir," she said, "would you be so kind as to show me how to wind this 'ere thing up? I've been trying for half-an-hour, an' I can't find the key-hole nowhere!"

"Gad!" shouted Mr. Hoskins. "What do you take it for, Mary?"

"'Ain't it one of them 'ere toy jumping frogs?" said she.

Then Mr. Hoskins shot out his legs in his excess of hilarity, and for a few minutes he couldn't speak a word. At last he managed to say:

"For goodness' sake, Mary; go downstairs, or I shall choke!"

Mary did go downstairs; and now Mrs. Hoskins wants a new servant. J. W.

Mr. Timmins Beetle Destroyer.

MR. TIMMINS bought a tortoise from a man in the street.

"Now, madam," said he on arriving from the City with his purchase, "you have been making my peaceful life unbearable with your nagging about the beetles and cockroaches who hold their 'at-homes' in our kitchen. Unable to stand it any longer, I have bought this wonderful animal—I mean insect—er—tortoise, madam, and to-morrow there won't be a beetle nearer than the house next door."

After placing the tortoise in the kitchen with a saucer of milk to quench its thirst after devouring a few hundred cockroaches, Mr. T. retires to rest.

Evidently the tortoise preys on his mind. About 3 a.m. Mrs. T. wakes in time to see her husband stealing downstairs with a candle in his hand; two minutes later a crash shakes the house, and Mrs. T. and the cook, on rushing downstairs, find Mr. Timmins has stumbled over the tortoise and is reclining against the wall with his head in the coal-scuttle, with about a dozen dead beetles underneath him, which he has crushed in his fall.

After accusing Mrs. Timmins of attempting his life for the hundredth time, he goes to bed. Next day a ton of insect-powder is delivered, and the tortoise has hidden itself in the garden.

A. E. H.

Misunderstood.

"WE must not forget," concluded the teacher at the end of the day's lessons, "what our fathers have taught us. On Monday I shall ask each of you boys to give me an example," and the class was dismissed.

On the following Monday one little fellow arrived and deposited a brown paper parcel on the teacher's desk, with a request that it might be returned, as it was a pet.

"Good gracious! whatever is this?" exclaimed the astonished master as he cut the string and revealed the contents.

"It's my father's tortoise, sir," replied the youngster proudly, "you said you wanted an example and I'm the only boy that's got one." A. H. J.

Mr. Bowser and the Tortoises.

HAVING failed in his mission of attempting to set things right, and being no longer infatuated with the charms of cycling, Mr. Bowser looked around for a new hobby; and finally decided to go in for natural history.

His plans being settled, he lost no time in hunting up specimens to form the nucleus of his zoological collection, and when he arrived home the other evening the budding naturalist brought with him a box containing a couple of tortoises.

"Whatever have you got there?" asked Mrs. Bowser, as he carried the box through the kitchen to the back garden.

"This, madam," he replied, "is the first instalment towards Bowser's twentieth century Noah's ark," and raising the lid he lifted out the tortoises and set them down on the grass before her.

"They seem to be mighty slow on their feet," said the cook after watching their movements critically for a time.

"Yes, you're right there," returned Bowser, "the speed at which they travel is painfully suggestive of the average messenger boy."

"And what funny creatures they are!" exclaimed his wife. "They seem to be encased in a sort of bomb-proof shelter. What is it supposed to be for?"

"Madam," replied Mr. Bowser, paving the way for a pun, "that bomb-proof shelter, as you call it, is to protect them from the constant siege to which they are exposed."

"But to what siege are they exposed?" she inquired, "and what is it that you mean?"

"I mean," he answered with a chuckle, "that the tortoises existence must be one long siege, since it is its lot to be always heavily shelled."

The joke missed fire, but Mr. Bowser was happy.

A. V.

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An Insect.

Mr. Buckland was travelling by train one day to give a lecture in the country and conveying a live rabbit. When tickets were examined he was asked for one for the rabbit, being told it was charged as a dog. Buckland immediately pulled a tortoise from his pocket, saying: "You'll be telling me this is a dog next!"

"Don't know, sir," said the porter, scratching his head. "I'll ask the station-master."

He soon returned, and delivered himself with the following astounding piece of natural history:

"No, sir; cats is dogs and rabbits is dogs, but a tortyise is a hinsec!" W. C. L.

Unprofitable.

Not long ago the captain of a small vessel gained a good livelihood by trading between certain places on the east coast of the United States.

On one occasion he thought he saw a good opportunity of making a fair sum out of a lot of tortoises, and he purchased as many as twenty dozen, paying for them at the rate of four dollars a dozen.

The tortoises were of all sizes, from those only a few days old to full grown ones.

At the next place at which he called after making his purchase, a hotel landlord came on board and asked the captain how he sold his tortoises. The captain replied:

"If you pick them out I shall have to charge you at least six dollars for each dozen; if you let me pick them, you can have them for three dollars a dozen."

"All right," said the hotel man, "you pick them out."

The captain selected several dozen of the smallest, when the man said: "Go ahead, I want more."

The captain was now among his largest tortoises, and wished the man would stop, but he still said: "Go on."

The captain saw the point at last. The man kept him selecting until he purchased the entire lot at the loss of twenty dollars to the owner.

After this the captain sold tortoises on a different plan. R. T.

Only His Nipper.

Some years ago, when travelling from Cardiff to Shrewsbury, I witnessed a most ludicrous scene.

In the same compartment with myself was an old lady and a sailor, the latter sitting just opposite the lady, and, spreading his bulky pockets out on the seat each side of him, was very soon sound asleep.

Presently, glancing over my book, I observed a movement in the man's pocket, and a slight rustling sound was plainly perceptible; it ceased for a time and then commenced again.

This was plainly unnerving to the old lady, who eyed the man and his moving pocket with evident alarm.

Resuming my book I was deep in an interesting passage when a loud scream caused me to jump up instantly, but no quicker than the old lady who, standing on the seat in the corner, with her skirts drawn up around her and her eyes fixed on a small tortoise, which had emerged from the man's pocket, was looking a picture of abject terror and apparently ready to faint.

The "salt," waking up, took in the situation at a glance, and securing his captive, said, with a broad grin:

"You've no cause to be afeard, mum; it's only my little 'nipper!'"

This, I suppose, meant his pet, but it took me a long time to convince the frightened old lady that the wee tortoise was perfectly harmless. H. H.

Pussy.

In 1864 I lived in Pimlico in a house reputed to be haunted by a "woman in black," whom both my mother and aunt declared they had seen.

Gathered in the anteroom one night, we had been discussing this subject. The clock struck midnight, and with the last stroke we were started by the swish, swish, as of the silken dress of someone descending the stairs from the top floor. Alarm was depicted on each face.

The sound came on steadily and regularly, but without any accompanying footstep. Past the room we were in, down into the hall, and through the swing-door into the kitchen it took its way.

Seizing a light, I followed to clear up the mystery and discovered the cat with some pasted wall-paper edging sticking to its foot, which it had brought from the top, where the paperhangers had been at work, and which produced the rustling as of a silk dress.

J. C.

RESULT OF "TRANSPOSED LETTER" COMPETITION.

The most complete list in this competition was sent in by Mr. H. C. Heathcote, 159 Trevelyan Road, Tooting, S.W., who has therefore been awarded the first prize of £5. As the next two most complete lists contained an equal number of words, the second and third prizes have been divided between Mr. E. D. Jones, 10 Brooklands Terrace, Swansea, and Mr. C. H. Poynter, 22 Exmoor Road, Southampton, each of them receiving thirty shillings.

RESULT OF BRAIN GYMNASIUM COMPETITION.

Nos. 253 to 258.

The first prize of £2 has been awarded this week to Master H. G. Pugh, of 92 Chepstow Road, Maindee, Newport, Mon., whose attempt was the first correct one dealt with.

A copy of "The Pauper Millionaire," by Austin Fryers, has been sent to each of the following:

C. Wise, The School, Bringewood, near Ludlow.
S. Fletcher, 11 Gaythorne Road, West Bowling, Bradford.
J. W. Shaw, Shillington, Hitchin.
Mrs. Ayers, 86 Birkbeck Road, Leytonstone.
Mrs. Ticken-Smith, 26 Garden Street, Wakefield.
Dr. A. Spearing, Springfield, Patricroft, Manchester.
A. Carn, 77 Henderson Road, Forest Gate, E.
W. H. Bailey, 54 Milton Street, Westoe, South Shields.
G. D. Taylor, 3 Pryme Street, Hull.
H. Turner, 29 Inwood Road, Hounslow.

IT MAKES YOU SCREAM
WITH LAUGHTER.

What does?

Why, watching a man try to do the Twenty Teazer.

There's nothing calculated to titillate the risual palate more effectively than Twenty Teazer.

BUY IT, 6d.
TRY IT,
DO IT.

The first two things are easily accomplished. But the third—no, you cannot do it, can you? If you do succeed let us know how long it took you.

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WE FOUR.

We were sitting in conclave. It was not at all a remarkable thing for us four sisters to be sitting in conclave, because we did it over everything, from a proposal of marriage to the choice of a new bonnet (the latter event of much more frequent occurrence than the former), but somehow to-day we seemed to be more in conclave than usual.

No wonder either, when the absorbing topic under discussion was the approaching proposal of marriage for Joan, from our cousin, Max Carew—not that we were calling him cousin then; when we did so it was only because he was present.

Joan was suffering so acutely from the re-action consequent upon her recent Edinburgh gaieties, that she did not work, or even pretend to do so. She only sat idly staring at our needles, as she enlarged upon her visit to the married sister of Max; told us how Max himself had come every day from his chambers in the city, to take her to see some new lion, and every night had escorted her to the opera, or a concert or theatre.

While Joan rehearsed these dissipations of hers, and sighed over their recollection, Dorothy and Patience and I worked away all the harder, just to show we didn't care a bit about them all in the way of being jealous.

We had had our turns in Edinburgh, when Max had been pleasant and attentive to each; and though we had never had such tales of his devotion to bring back as Joan had now (and we all knew it), we would sooner die than recall the fact aloud before her.

Why should Max have chosen Joan before anyone had chosen either Dorothy, or Patience, or me? She was by no means the most attractive of us. She wasn't half so sensible or domestic as Dorothy, nor half so handsome as Patience, nor half so—well, at any rate she wasn't *nicer* than me! And the whole three of us ought to have been married before Joan. There was Dorothy, our eldest, in the corner of the couch on Joan's right, she was eight and twenty, only nobody knew it but ourselves.

Then, there was Patience opposite her, sitting, as usual, upright in her chair. She was the beauty of the family, as everyone knew—as she knew, at any rate; and there was myself on Joan's left, quite on the shady side of twenty, which Joan hadn't reached yet. Why, of course we all ought to have been married before her. Yet we had now to entertain the prospect of officiating at her wedding first of all.

It *was* mortifying, to say the very least of it.

"What's the matter, Barbara?" inquired Patience, suddenly. I suppose because she saw my eyebrows raised and my mouth down at the corners.

"I was thinking what a good thing it is that there is the probability of Max marrying one of us. We are such an overwhelming number. It must require superhuman courage in a man to propose to one of four marriageable sisters; he must feel like proposing to them all."

"Why is it," mused Dorothy, putting in her needle very deliberately, "that four should seem such an enormous number when it bears upon unmarried sisters? We shall not seem even half so many when we are three."

"And the others go off so much more easily when one is married," I put in, consolingly. "The married one marries off one more—of course. That's her first duty. Then there are two houses to visit; and if one unmarried one stays at each, they marry directly."

"Yes, I do believe," said Patience, with meditation, "that many matches are brought about through visiting a brother-in-law."

"It often happens, too," asserted Joan, with an air of experience, "that the best man at a wedding falls in love with——"

"The best bridesmaid. That always happens. Which of us will it be?"

Patience, from her lofty pedestal, looked scornfully across at me when I made that remark. Of course, she would be the best bridesmaid so far as appearance went—she knew that; but then, Patience was—well, her godfather and godmothers at her baptism had not been gifted with any remarkable prescience.

"I suppose Dorothy will be the first of us to marry. She naturally ought to be," sighed Joan, with a sentimental air of resignation for which I could have choked her, because she evidently felt so sure of being the first herself unnaturally.

"No; it would be Patience first," replied Dorothy with just as much resignation.

But Patience sighed resignedly, too, and said that under any circumstances (she didn't specify the circumstances) she should be sorry to take precedence of her elder sister.

Of course it sounded very well, but I would not like to have tested her.

"It was so kind of Max to bring me home, wasn't it?" inquired Joan, naively, "and he was so careful of me on the journey."

"He certainly has the knack of making things pleasant for one," spoke Dorothy, "and making one pleased with oneself as well as with him."

"The oftener one sees him the better then," said I, sententiously.

"Yes," assented Patience, "I'm not sorry that he is coming next week."

"I suppose you are quite sure he said he was coming; eh, Joan?" inquired I; always the sceptical one of the family.

"Quite sure," returned Joan, resuming the lackadaisical pose of her head; "and quite sure that he told me on the way home that he had something particular to

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say to us—he didn't say to me, because it would have been so very marked."

"It will be a pleasant change to have a gentleman about the house for a bit," put in Dorothy, with placidity.

"It always seemed so nice to have him about the house in Edinburgh," sighed Joan, "and he was always so indulgent to me; forever planning some amusement for me, or some change."

Then somebody said—and I cannot be sure who it was—that it would be well for one of us to write to Max, and say that we should expect him by the afternoon train every day next week—I mean, of course, we should expect him every day until we saw him. Then, naturally, the question arose which should write.

"I suppose I ought," said Joan, complacently.

"Why so?" asked I, with a snap. "Who so fit as Dorothy—being the eldest?"

"Or Patience?" proposed Dorothy; "she writes the best hand."

Patience accepted the position under protest; yet after all, the task was tacitly conceded to Joan. And then and there I made a firm determination not to help her with a single idea, as I regretted having done on many previous occasions.

"I should think, Joan," said I, with great determination, when I had relieved my mind by this resolution, "Max cannot be coming to see you, because you have been together so lately. I wonder which of us he is coming to see—Dorothy, I expect."

Dorothy smiled at the idea. But Patience looked unutterable discernment about whom she thought it more natural he should come to see.

Then, after a good while, we fell back into our first chat about Joan's wedding; for, though we didn't quite see the fun of giving tamely up to our youngest sister the only suitor who seemed to be forthcoming, we were too fond of each other to regret the probable triumph of one; and too fond of ourselves not to be quite aware that the marriage of one—even though that one must be the youngest—would be a benefit to all. So we discussed it all as a definite thing for Joan, and hid our own private opinions.

Joan had brought from Edinburgh a glowing description of the little Dolly Varden aprons which had just come into fashion, and had minutely described one with pink trimmings which Max had admired. This narrative had sunk deep into my mind, and from that time I devoted all my leisure moments—in solitude and my own room—to the manufacture of a similar one.

Oh! the heartburnings I suffered when steps were heard in the passage while I sat closeted there, with a lapful of ribbon ends and loops, and an open bandbox at my feet ready to swallow the materials *en masse* on the approach of prying eyes.

But, above all things, oh! the nervousness of appearing in it first on that Monday evening just before the train from Edinburgh was due, for of course it would never have done to keep it hidden, until Max had actually arrived, and then have had suddenly to appear in it, while the girls interchanged glances and put me out for the whole evening.

I could not venture that, so I boldly put it on and went into the drawing-room, assuming an expression that was intended to be unconscious, but was really defiant in the extreme, and rapidly uttering some very irrevelant observation for the purpose of turning every one's attention from my new and startling garment. But the remark and the expression of countenance were alike depressing failures. I might just as well have rushed in exclaiming at the very top of my voice, "Look here! Look at my new apron! I made it all myself, in secret, and at great expense; and for no earthly purpose but to captivate Max."

I might just as well have said it out that way in full, so plainly was it repeated in all the faces. Stupids! The more I tried to eye them down in my intense defiance, the more the six eyes glared at it. The bows grew limp under the trying scrutiny. I hopelessly felt that no such a caricature of a person had ever before rushed into their midst armed (to no purpose) with an irrelevant observation.

The apron grew, to my disordered fancy, ugly and enormous, and I could, with supreme satisfaction to myself, have pitched it on the fire. But then what a defeat that would have been, and after all Max *had* admired one just like it. If I could but just live down this first ordeal, presently, perhaps, my Dolly Varden would assume its natural proportions, and my mind its natural equilibrium.

I went boldly into the midst of the astonished eyes, and then I saw my opportunity and seized it. With one glance I took in the fact that Patience had made an investment, too. She had at least a guinea's worth of extra plaits on her head this afternoon for the first time, and these served beautifully as a means of removing the other four glaring eyes from my pink bows.

The plaits weren't becoming to Patience, their falseness being quite evident in a strong light; but I didn't mention this in consequence of the relief they had given me.

"What have you got new, Dorothy?" I asked, growing presently courageous, "plaits or aprons? Or have you branched out into a new line?"

"I have branched out into a new line," acquiesced Dorothy, good-humouredly, "and got *nothing*."

"I wouldn't," put in Patience, a little bit severely, "stoop to hide my investments, if I were you, Dorothy" (which was quite true for Patience never stooped).

And we didn't say a word more, though there upon the grate stood the little drawing-room kettle, with china handle, which she had been into town that morning on purpose to buy.

Housekeeping always was Dorothy's weak point, and Max was known to be very keen on appreciating the convenient or elegant appliances of a meal.

Well, every day that week, at the same time, we prepared for Max; in our plaits, and pink bows, and with tea laid for five, and the glistening little kettle singing on the trivet.

Five days out of the six passed, and the preparations had so far been wasted; except that they had grown familiar to us now, and we wore them without uncomfortable consciousness. But on the Saturday morning, when we came down to breakfast, there lay one of Max Carew's letters on the table—unmistakable with its handsome crest and bold address, "Miss Pendlethorpe."

"Good gracious!" I cried, with the keenest enjoyment, "It's Dorothy he means, after all."

"Don't be a goose, Barbara," reproved Patience, who had entered the room with me, and now advanced with her stately step to look over my shoulder. "Of course, if he writes to say he is coming, he would naturally address to Dorothy, as we have no mother."

"And if he is in love with her, he would naturally address to her too," I added, not quite seeing why Dorothy should be laid upon the shelf just yet.

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"Come, Dorothy, don't keep us waiting," cried Joan; "I'm in an unbearable state of excitement."

But Dorothy would not hurry. I believe in my own mind that she preferred the suspense to the certainty. So, as we saw this, we made a great effort to hide our own eagerness, and began weakly and abortively to talk on other topics.

I never remember noticing before how desperately slow Dorothy is in opening a letter. I thought she never would have finished breaking the seal of this one; and, when at last it was broken, she deliberately looked between the leaves, and turned the sheet round twice.

"Oh, the signature is there all right," remarked Patience, just a little tartly. "What comes before the signature?"

"Of course he only writes to say when he is coming," returned Dorothy, with indifference so supreme and unnatural that it was plain enough to see it was feigned. "I suppose you can all wait while I read it," she added, looking at us over the paper with great aggravating enjoyment.

And to prove how utterly indifferent we all were to the contents of this absurd letter, we turned entirely away, and helped ourselves to tongue and bread and butter—*ad libitum*—just for two moments and a half. Then somehow we found our attention again concentrating itself upon Dorothy, who was reading steadily now, and in utter silence. I couldn't help it—I didn't try, but I felt quite sure that I couldn't have helped it if I had tried—I went near enough behind her to read over her shoulder, and the first two words I saw gave me an extraordinary sensation.

"My wife."

My heart bumped and thumped against my side. Which was it to be? Sure to be Joan. Yet, after all, it might be Dorothy. No; it would be Patience, of course—which of us looked anything beside Patience? Yet, why not me? I could remember hundreds of flattering and affectionate speeches Max had made to me. It was just as likely to be me.

It wasn't human power (feminine) to resist temptation any longer. While Dorothy read on, not vouchsafing us a word of explanation, we tacitly burst the bounds of polite conventionality and—one at a time first, then altogether daringly—hovered so near that we could distinguish the words.

I don't know whether Patience and Joan read it all straight through as I did, or whether they stopped dead at the first as I felt inclined to do. All I know is that *I* read it through from the ominous first line, My—Dear—Cousins, down to the flourish after the signature; and felt not at all mollified by the performance.

Dear me, couldn't he have chosen one to write to, and not swallowed up our individuality in such a distasteful gulp? Well, after saying that—My dear cousins—he said he had hoped to be able to run over to tell us the news himself, but had been unavoidably prevented.

On the first of the next month he was going to marry Minnie Frere, whom Joan would recollect having met in Edinburgh, and he was sure we should give him our valued sympathy, and kind and generous good wishes. His greatest desire just then, he added, was that we would extend to his wife the delightful friendship which had always been so much prized by him.

I believe there was more—lots more!—but wasn't that enough? We simultaneously attacked our breakfast, without uttering a word which related to Max; with faces set to an unnatural expression of beaming self-satisfaction, and voices tuned to joyous hilarity.

There was one circumstance attending the arrival of that letter which gave me unbounded satisfaction. It had *not* come by the afternoon post, to find us all expecting Max himself.

My apron—with all its pink bows opened jauntily—was at any rate out of sight in my bottom drawer; and this congratulation was not even marred by the consideration that Patience reaped an equal benefit. She could never have borne her position half so well if the new guinea plait had not been—I suppose in the same sarcophagus in which it lay undisturbed for weeks after that.

Certainly Dorothy's new kettle was asserting itself conspicuously by warbling away on the fire; but we didn't mind so much, because a few minutes before, in consequence of Dorothy's putting it down pettishly in the very hottest part of the fire, its china handle had cracked all across and fallen half away, so that it looked decapitated enough now to take away its sting.

MARK HARDCASTLE.

THE WHITE LADY'S CURSE,

A TALE OF GEORGIAN DAYS.

BY HENRY T. JOHNSON.

Appears in this week's "BIG BUDGET."

This powerful story will shortly be produced in its dramatised form at one of the best known London theatres.

"I struck a match and looked quite close into the sockets without any eyes, the teeth with no lips to cover them."

You will be able to read more about this striking scene in

THE WHITE LADY'S CURSE,

which will appear next THURSDAY in

"THE BIG BUDGET," 1d.

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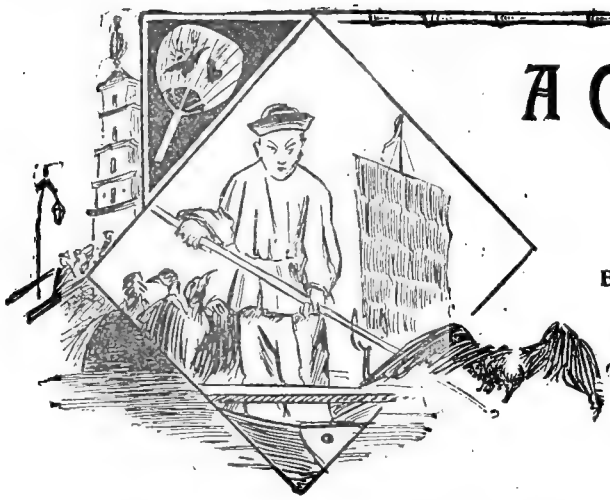

A CORNER IN CAMPHOR.

Being a Chapter in the Unwritten History of China

"I'll allow there are rogues in all countries, and of all colours and all complexions," said the man in the cabbage-palm hat, with his hand on the door; "but for pure unadulterated iniquity 'the Heathen Chinee is peculiar, as my illustrious countryman out West has very tersely put it. But I guess the resources of civilisation are not exhausted, Mr. Watson." With which oracular remark Mr. Rufus K. Umphelby opened the door and left the apartment.

Mr. James Watson, resident manager at Shanghai of the big Fung Yang Syndicate, whose headquarters were in East India Avenue, Leadenhall Street, was sitting in his office on the water-front in a very depressed condition of spirit and a correspondingly dejected attitude of mind. Too limp even to find consolation in the very excellent cigar which his colleague, Mr. Rufus K. Umphelby, of the American Settlement, across the muddy Soo-chow creek, had recommended to him as a never-failing panacea for all earthly ills, he had allowed the cheroot to go out after Umphelby's departure, and now sat chewing the end thereof, sublimely unconscious of everything save the one, dull, cold, paralysing fact that financial ruin and commercial disgrace were within measurable distance, and advancing with strides that must soon overtake him and bring him crashing to the ground.

Nothing could save him—nothing, he had told Umphelby, short of a miracle, unless it were one of those heaven-directed combinations of time, place, and circumstance, which in the melodrama dear to the heart of his youth had so often been the salvation of distressed virtue on the old Adelphi boards.

But alas for the weaknesses of human nature. Jemmy knew too well that the virtue which was rated highest by the Fung Yang Syndicate was hardly the sort for which he could expect a *deus ex machinâ* would intervene in the day of trouble.

Moral excellencies are not exactly the sort of goods which commercial syndicates care to stock. Financial successes are a better line, and Mr. Watson's ventures hitherto had been eminently successful; but in an evil hour he had been tempted to touch camphor. He had gone into the camphor deal cheerfully, and had stayed in till he couldn't see his way out.

His speculations in the odoriferous drug were hardly covered by £50,000. He had been selling it in every market in both hemispheres. He had sold it in Canton and Hankow. He had sold it in London and sold it in Paris. He had sold it in New York and sold it in San Francisco. He stood to make a very handsome pile out of the camphor deal when he was through; but the elaborately-constructed machinery had not been running a week before Jemmy made a discovery. He was "cornered."

Jemmy had bought and sold, bought and sold, on the strength of reports made to him by his native agents on the probable yield of the camphor laurel—Rufus K. Umphelby standing in with him over the Yankee deal; but as that didn't figure out at more than 20,000 dollars on a total of 250,000 it didn't take much off the dead weight of the "carry"—and now, after the operation had been in progress for several months, Watson found that he had oversold himself to an extent that spelt ruin. While orders for delivery were pouring in daily there wasn't an ounce of the stuff to be had in the market. The stocks Jemmy held had been exhausted in a week.

In vain he urged the native growers and manufacturers who had put out contracts to deliver. They pleaded—first, that they were only bound to deliver at the nearest treaty port, which they were quite ready to do; next, that the local governor had placed an export duty on all camphor going for shipment, which they were not willing to pay; then that the laurels had failed and the crop was short; lastly, that as the Fung Yang Syndicate was not taking the camphor they had contracted for the factors were unloading it on the inland market, and should look to the Syndicate to recoup them the difference in price.

It was enough to make a man say things that were unfit for publication. But when Jemmy learnt that Kwang Sen, the Taotai of Shanghai, had been the principal purchaser for the home and foreign market the situation at once became clear and intelligible.

Years back, at Canton, Kwang had been removed on a complaint of Watson's. At Shanghai, whither they had subsequently found themselves, their relations had never been strained, and had always been outwardly cordial. The Englishman bore no ill-will, and believed the Chinaman harboured no malice. Kwang Taotai had been biding his time. The Englishman had first to be lulled to sleep.

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Englishmen, argued Kwang Sen, thought less of their lives than of their honour. If now he could make this Englishman suffer in his honour, could humiliate him in his own country and before his own kind, strip him of his wealth, stamp him as a beggar—a man dishonoured and disgraced—it would be a revenge worth striving for, a revenge worthy of the cause—the Yellow Man against the White.

Through Yo-Chow, Watson's chief native agent, Kwang had learnt all about the camphor contracts and laid his plans accordingly. It was an agent of Kwang's who had first opened the deal to Watson; it was Kwang himself who was now pressing for delivery, not only in the home market but on the banks of the Thames; not only in Paris but in New York and San Francisco. The wires were pulled at Shanghai, and the puppets moved obediently on the shores of the Seine and in the Empire City, in London Town and at the Golden Gate. Kwang was a merchant prince, and had agents at all the chief centres of European commerce.

With the reputation of being a good hand at a deal, with a shrewd insight into men, and a ready comprehension of the exigencies of the moment, Jemmy found himself completely cornered by the artlessness of the child-like and bland, whose knowledge of time-bargains, shortages, and sales for future delivery, was fearfully and wonderfully displayed to the everlasting undoing of the Englishman.

How was he to get out? How, indeed! That was the question he had been considering when Rufus K. Umphelby had dropped in. It was the question he was still considering when Rufus K. Umphelby had gone out.

Rufus had made certain suggestions, to which his parting remark had distinctly pointed; but Jemmy, while not inexperienced in practical politics, thought China was hardly the country on which to try Central American fashions. It was not that he was unwilling, but the risks were much greater. So Umphelby had taken his leave thinking the strangest thoughts, and Watson had stayed behind doing ditto, but the longer Jemmy thought the less able was he to scheme, to evolve any plan that he would be willing to bet on.

That oily, simpering, old devil, Kwang Sen, was giving the screw another turn every day. He had seen him only that morning, and with much washing of hands with invisible soap in imperceptible water, Kwang had told him how he had been obliged to send to Pingloo for the camphor which the Fung Yang Syndicate should have delivered this week, that the price had sprung several points since last quotation, and that carriage would cost nearly twice as much more.

He was grieved to the very centre of his internal economy—the old hypocrite—for the Honourable Syndicate, and his heart—never knew a Chinaman to have one, had been Jemmy's mental comment at the moment—was broken into ten thousand pieces on account of his illustrious friend; but was it not written in the Book of Wise Maxims that "success cometh not by striving but is sent to every man according to his works?"

Jemmy smiled bitterly at the recollection, and thought unutterable things. A Scotsman, Burns' hackneyed line about the plans "o' mice and men going oft agley" naturally occurred to him. His plans for a camphor scoop had gone very far agley; but the consolation he might at another time have found in Robbie Burns was not to be gathered from him to-day.

Jemmy thought he understood now how Sampson felt when he was brought forth to make sport for the Philistines.

It irked him to feel that he was the toy and plaything of this yellow "iniquity" with the ever-lasting simper upon his soulless face.

The loss in £ s. d. would be bad enough, but the loss in prestige, in *savoir-faire* and commercial caste, would be infinitely worse.

Never again would James Watson, Esq., of London and Shanghai, be able to hold up his head on the China market if these shambling, shifty Celestials scored off him over the camphor contracts. And do it they would, unless——

"Yes," muttered Jemmy, catching at an idea which had been vaguely floating in his mind, "camphor must be accumulating somewhere since so little is coming into the market. Yes, Rufus K. Umphelby's suggestion might be worth considering if——Hang it all," he burst out angrily, "there's always some confounded if in a man's way whenever he wants to do anything. The trump cards are held by Kwang and his friends. Before I get a chance to cut they'll have won the game. They mean to force up prices, compel the Syndicate to buy at the inflated figure, pay the differences, or settle for a fixed sum. Then, having finished the squeeze, they'll unload the stuff, and there'll be camphor on offer all over the shop." Jemmy flung his unfinished cigar across the room and groaned aloud. "Stocks must be accumulating somewhere," he repeated with desperate energy, beginning to pace up and down.

At that moment Jemmy's chief *compradore* appeared on the threshold.

"Can see? All light? Talkee pidgin?" said Yo with an evil smirk on his yellow features.

"Come in, Yo," said Jemmy, who had an idea in his head. "Plenty much talkee. You savvy?"

"Can do. Kwang Sen velly bad man," muttered Yo.

Jemmy raised his eyebrows. His idea seemed likely to germinate without forcing.

"Yo wishee happiness, wishee peace, wishee prosperity number-one-English-pidgin-man," and kow-towing elaborately, Yo came forward as requested, while Jemmy grinned, put a bottle of *samshu* on the table, and lit a fresh cigar.

The conversation which followed was long, complicated, and involved. It was carried on in that horrible jargon known as pidgin-English, which is wearisome to reproduce when it is easy to understand. In Yo's case, however, much of it would be unintelligible to an outsider, and not being required for the telling of the story, may be dispensed with altogether.

Jemmy had sojourned in the Flowery Land quite long enough not to deceive himself over the motives which had induced Yo Chow to offer up Kwang Sen as a sacrifice to the injured feelings of the Englishman, and to do the Chinaman justice he made no assumption of virtues to which the yellow race is a complete and utter stranger.

It was love of pelf, greed of gain, which had opened Yo's eyes to the wickedness of Kwang Sen. A lively sense of favours to come is the only power which exercises any influence over the actions of John Chinaman, when it is not fear, abject and direct. Give John reason to believe that he has nothing more to expect and though he may have served you for half a lifetime, he will immediately transfer his talents—to your worst enemy by preference.

It was, therefore, not without a strong sense of the

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sardonic that Jemmy listened to the tale which laid bare the iniquity of Kwang Sen. It was told without the exhibition of a single human emotion by a man who confessed himself stripped of all his possessions, even to his wife and—coffin.

Like all good Chinamen, Yo was a devoted disciple of fan-tan and an ardent admirer of che-me, forms of gambling which he had pursued with varying success since the days of his youth. But since Han Yan from Whampoa appeared on the scene "the devil had been in the dice," and whether it was fan-tan or che-me, Yo had lost, lost, lost, till he had nothing left to lose, even the coffin which had cost him so much and the wife who had cost him so little—"she veer cheap" had been Yo's principal reason for marrying her—even these prime necessities to a Chinaman had been staked and lost.

"Me nothing. Allee gone," said Yo, smiling serenely at Jemmy.

It was not till he realised the fact that his sole possession was a bit of information of no use to anybody but the manager of the Fung Yang Syndicate that Yo Chow awoke to the enormity of the wickedness of Kwang Sen.

"And this camphor is at Swatow and at Tai-nan, in the island of Formosa?"

Yo made a sign in the affirmative.

"Six thousand yen on the mainland and nine thousand on the island? H'm! Come to me at 7 a.m. to-morrow, Yo, and I'll give you an answer."

In less than fifteen minutes after Yo had left the go-down, Jemmy was at Honkiew, the American Settlement across the creek. Rufus K. Umphelby, who was strolling down Broadway, guessed that "the resources of civilisation were not exhausted," and mended his steps. Both men entered the hong at the same moment.

"Don't spoil the best chance you ever had, Mr. Watson, and forfeit the gratitude of the whole community. It's a dead cert, sir. They want a lesson, and that's a fact. The rascals will never dream of resisting. Confine yourself to words, and you may as well write off your losses, for lie they will through thick and thin till the worse appears the better cause, and all who haven't learnt John's little ways will cry shame on the brutal Englishman. But nobody out here will. Not a white man in China but will cry 'Bravo, bravissimo,' let the folks in London howl as they will. And after all's said, it's you who take the risks, not they."

"Don't think I hesitate on my own account, Mr. Umphelby," said Jemmy with a curious smile. "I was at Whampoa you know in '69. But to make war on China is rather a big order for a private trader. I don't want to get the fellows out here into trouble with the big-wigs at home, and if the job didn't come off right——"

"Do you think the big-wigs at home, in London or Washington, understand so much as the A B C of Peking politics?" put in Umphelby.

"No, I don't, and that's where the harm comes in. Supposing now——"

"I tell you these muddy-peaked, rat-eating Asiatics will never dare to resist the resources of civilisation."

Jemmy laughed.

"The stuff is unquestionably mine," he said after a pause. "It's been sent to Swatow and elsewhere simply to prevent me getting hold of it. Undoubtedly I have the right to seize it; but—it may mean war with China."

"Waal, all I can say to that, Mr. Watson, is that if my people had a crowd o' gunboats gettin' in each other's way on this yere heathen coast for want of a job I should find them one durn'd quick, and that's a fact."

"I'll tell you now how I think the trick might be worked," said Jemmy in confidential tones. Penfold, our consul at Swatow, is a friend o' mine. There's a coaster going down to-morrow. I'll take Yo along, get him to swear an information as to the ownership of the camphor stocks, and see if Penfold hasn't got a chum on the station—an enterprising young lieutenant, say—who, putting a liberal interpretation on somewhat doubtful instructions, would make an armed demonstration in front of Tai-nan. Less likelihood, p'raps, of a row on the island than on the mainland. It might frighten Kwang into releasing enough stuff to enable me to fulfil my western contracts, and might also——"

"Remove him to another sphere," chipped in Rufus K. Umphelby cheerfully. "We're going to put this thing through, Mr. Watson, for the benefit of the white population in China, and that's surely worth taking a little risk over. If the pepple at home don't know their book I guess you're going to teach 'em."

A fortnight after Mr. James Watson and Rufus K. Umphelby had foregathered in the office of the latter at Honkiew, Shanghai.

A British gunboat had appeared off Tai-nan, Island of Formosa, and made a formal demand for the camphor stored there to the prejudice of the Fung Yang Syndicate, the lawful owners.

It was refused, whereupon the lieutenant commanding had opened fire on the town. Half-a dozen lives had been lost, the yamen of the magistrate destroyed, and much property injured. Result, consternation at Peking and Hong Kong. But an order was sent down promptly from Shanghai to release the camphor.

In a time so short that it seemed incredible, Jemmy found himself able to meet all engagements, even forcing Kwang Sen to accept delivery at prices which left him on the wrong side of the account.

Long after the camphor contracts had become a memory amongst the white community at Shanghai, long after Kwang Sen had been degraded as one consequence and Jemmy Watson promoted as another, long after the Fung Yang Syndicate had paid a heavy dividend out of the camphor scoop, and Jemmy was contemplating a big deal in brick tea, messages were still passing between Peking, Hong Kong, and London over "the affair at Formosa," which, however, London never understood, and the Admiral and the Minister were content to leave it so.

"Let the talking-shop at Westminster look after its manners," said the Admiral one day at the Country Club, out on Bubbling-Well Road, "and the Navy will look after theirs, and take uncommon good care that 'Chop-Dollar Jack' looks gay and smart after his."

And in this fashion history is made.

H. HUNTER.

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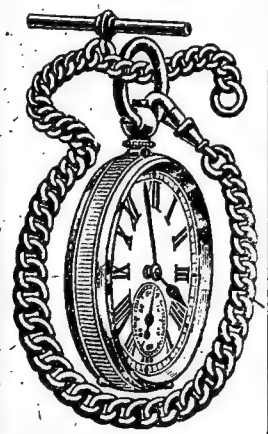

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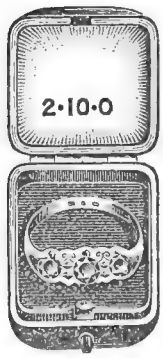

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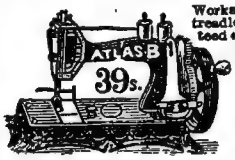

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Pulsifer Maginley's Christmas.

It was the day before Christmas. Pulsifer Maginley was seated in his office, upon his face an expression of agony that would have been worth £5 a week to him as an undertaker.

Pulsifer Maginley was an operator on the Stock Exchange. Sometimes he operated not wisely but too well. This was one of the times. Some weeks before he had fancied that he scented from afar a tremendous rise in the market. He converted all his available assets into stock of the X.Y.Z. Railway. As soon as he had done so the stock began to drop, and it was still dropping.

"The blessed Christmastide is at hand," mused Pulsifer; "the streets are filled with busy, happy throngs; the small boy is in a state of feverish anticipation; the church bazaar is getting in its deadly work; and I have but 15s. left. What becomes of my propitiatory gift to old Mortimer Bluff?"

Pulsifer Maginley loved and was beloved. Mary Jane Bluff was responsible for this unfortunate state of affairs. She was the daughter and sole heiress of Mortimer Bluff, Esq., who was known to be a millionaire. She could not help this, and Pulsifer was willing to overlook it.

Old Mr. Bluff did not favour young Maginley's suit. He wanted his daughter to marry a plumber or a bank cashier. And here the matter rested at the time our story opens.

"I will go round and try to borrow a fiver from old Jenkins to stand me over till after Christmas," said Pulsifer, rising at last with a heavy sigh.

* * * * *

When Pulsifer Maginley reached the more or less palatial mansion of his friend Malvolio Jenkins, he was ushered into the reception-room by a haughty menial.

As he sat awaiting the entrance of the man from whom he intended to procure the means to celebrate the coming holiday in a fitting manner, his attention was attracted by the sound of voices in the adjoining room. With unstudied grace, an ingenuous smile upon his features, he sank upon his knees and applied his ear to the keyhole.

In five minutes he rose, his face beaming with a smile of generous dimensions.

"Who would have suspected it?" he remarked in an inquiring voice. Malvolio Jenkins glided into the room.

"I overheard all," was Maginley's greeting.

"Then you know—"

"That Petruchio Dowd, of the old firm of Petruchio Dowd and Co., bankers, of which you are a member, has fled to the land of Jabez Balfour."

"It is true," said Mr. Jenkins; "but we do not want the papers to get hold of it until the latest possible moment—not until after Christmas. May I rely upon your secrecy?"

"You may. Lend me £10 will you?"

Malvolio Jenkins handed over the money without a word.

"Did Mr. Dowd leave nothing?" inquired Pulsifer.

"Ah, he was not wholly bad," said Jenkins, in a voice choked with emotion. "He left the carpets and furniture."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing."

"Your private fortune, then——?"

"Is in my wife's name."

"But what will the depositors get?"

"Left," replied Jenkins, with a silvery laugh.

Pulsifer Maginley was a man of large mental resources. Before he courted sleep that Christmas Eve he had planned all the details of a great scheme for his worldly advancement.

* * * * *

On Christmas morning Pulsifer sought and obtained an audience with old Mortimer Bluff.

"My dear sir," he said, "I am aware that you are deeply interested in the Home for Incurable Prudes. I, too, have the welfare of that institution at heart, and, as I have been singularly fortunate of late, I wish to give to it, through you, the trifling sum of ten thousand pounds as a Christmas gift."

He handed the old gentleman a cheque for the amount named on the banking house of Petruchio Dowd and Co.

Mr. Bluff was evidently greatly surprised and moved.

"You—you bank with them?" he stammered.

"All that I have in the world is in their bank."

"They are men of sterling integrity."

Pulsifer smiled broadly. It was, however, an internal smile, and was not visible to the naked eye.

"I have been somewhat mistaken in you," said Mr. Bluff. "I know you better now. I have also a Christmas gift for you. Mary Jane is yours."

* * * * *

When the news of the utter and complete failure of the firm of Petruchio Dowd and Co. was published, Mr. Bluff felt sorry for the Prudes' Home, but sorrier for Pulsifer Maginley. He offered to lend him money, and Pulsifer did not make any strenuous objections.

Before he could learn the truth, Mr. Bluff accommodatingly died of apoplexy.

When a year had elapsed Pulsifer Maginley led Mary Jane to the altar.

This little story teaches us that virtue is its own reward.

W. E. Percy.

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All you have to do is to write underneath each picture, in the space provided, the name of the player you believe the picture to represent. The names are those of both Rugby and Association players.

Only one solution is allowed under each picture.

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The prizes will be paid to the competitors from whom we receive the correct, or most nearly correct, solutions.

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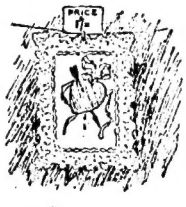

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